Fate, Fortune, Forever

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by barcharonte

Summary

By now, both Will and Hannibal should know better than to plan for things. Like their own wedding. Right? Right.

Notes

Hi everyone :) As promised, I'm continuing the series. This addition is complete, and I will post the remaining two chapters as soon as I finish proofreading them. I hope you enjoy it!

Chapter 1

Will let the door slam shut behind him and toed his shoes off carelessly. Hannibal, cocking his head towards the sounds of the shoes dropping one after the other, followed closely by keys being thrown atop the console at the foyer, knew it could only mean one thing. However, before he could give his full attention to Will, he needed to conclude his phone call.

“It’s a beautiful museum by the Pontchartrain, Hannibal. Beau and I spent an entire day there a couple of months ago, and while I was researching, I found that they also rent the place for weddings! You could have your reception in the building, or in the sculpture garden! Don’t you think that’s amazing?”

Will entered the kitchen and went straight to the stools by the island. One glance at him was enough to confirm Hannibal’s suspicions about how Will spent his day. His shoulders were so tense that they swallowed up Will’s neck, a beautiful frown marring his features, eyes barely hiding the storm going on in that enchanting brain of his.

“It sounds wonderful, Madeleine,” Hannibal replied, holding up a hand to Will to convey that he would end the call soon. “However, I do not believe Will would like to be wedded in a museum.”

Will’s frown deepened, and he shook his head slowly. It was so refreshing to see him openly moody and contrary, though Hannibal knew by now not to give voice to such thoughts in the heat of the moment. It could fan flames that could either have them go at it mindlessly, or have Will not speak to Hannibal for a few hours. Those were not odds he was willing to bet on.

His compassion for Will, it could be said, was inconvenient at times.

“Oh,” Madeleine answered. She and Will had not developed their relationship past overly-polite exchanges and carefully-kept distances, but Hannibal knew it was not for lack of trying on her part. Still, when pointed out, she could recognize Will’s penchant for turning down extravagance. It was, after all, a trait he shared with his father. “Well then, I will keep looking. Please let me know if you find anything to your liking.”

“Of course,” Hannibal replied, inclining his head slightly as if she were in front of him. “I appreciate your assistance, Madeleine. Please convey my regards to Beau.”

“And you give my love to Will,” Madeleine said. She ended all their conversations with that, and Hannibal complied each time.

“Will do.”

Once the call was ended and the phone was placed on the island, Hannibal turned completely to Will, who was now slumped over the counter and glaring straight ahead.

“She sends her love,” Hannibal said, but it failed to get a reaction out of Will. “I suspect you have solved the case,” Hannibal prompted when the silence was unbroken.

“Yeah,” Will said, visibly trying to unclench his jaw. “I did that.”

“And?” Hannibal asked. Will had been working as a freelance private investigator for two months now. His latest client was a woman in her late twenties, madly in love with her fiancé and excited to build a future with him, but deeply insecure and suspicious of his long absences and frequent business trips that lasted multiple days. Hannibal suspected Will, as well as empathizing with her due to his peculiar mind, also *sympathized* with her on the ground of having an unreliable romantic partner and a fear of being betrayed. Hannibal had been working on alleviating such insecurities, and they had come a long way. Yet, at times like this, those fears reminded themselves. “Was he taking those trips for business only?”

“He’s married,” Will said, deadpan. “Has a child, even. They took her to the playground today.” He sighed, hiding his face in both hands and rubbing at his eyes vigorously.

“Ah.” Hannibal walked around the island to stand behind Will’s slouching form. That Will had not even taken off his jacket was a sign of high stress in itself, but upon touching his exposed neck with both hands, using the tips of his fingers to massage the tight muscles, Hannibal realized the full gravity of the situation. “Why don’t you direct your client to me? I may not have been active in my practice for some time, but perhaps I can start again with her as my patient.”

Will let his head dip forward as Hannibal continued his administrations. It was relaxing even with the clothes limiting his movement. Will disguised the relieved puff of breath that escaped him as a huff. “You mean we manipulate the poor woman into killing her married fiancé?”

“It’s called *therapy*, Will,” Hannibal said, and confident that he would not be seen, allowed a smirk onto his face as he increased the pressure of his fingers. “It would be *therapeutic*.”

“Hannibal,” Will murmured, this time disguising his exasperation as a sigh of relief at his muscles becoming lax. “No. This one, it’s for us, I think.”

“Is that so?” Hannibal asked. Will straightened and turned on the stool to face him. He had to lift his head to be able to meet Hannibal’s eyes.

“Do you think it would be unwise?”

Hannibal gazed down at Will’s face, much more composed from when he entered the kitchen, but the storm in his eyes still raging. His curls had grown longer over the past months, and he refused to have it cut. Adding his stubble into the mix was smart, because he looked scruffy, adorable, and unassuming. It was expertly deceitful, and it helped him during his investigations.

Since Will started offering his PI services, he had a total of five clients. Two of the people the clients wanted investigated were judged and sentenced by Will Graham, found fit to be only dinner. If they did the same with this unfaithful man, it would be the third.

“I believe that, with caution, we can manage it,” Hannibal said, lifting a hand to swipe the hair back from Will’s forehead. When Will leaned slightly into his touch, he smiled. “It has been some time since we laid the Harbinger to rest. We know when to stop, my love, that distinguishes us from the mindless and the impulsive. You only need to keep in mind that there may came a day when you need to stop choosing victims from your clientele’s networks.”

“I know,” Will said with a slight grimace, which Hannibal was quick to touch and send away. He was rewarded with a smile. “Once more, then. Maybe this PI thing is not for me, you know? I can’t even wear a fedora, we already have a rolodex full, and I go searching for more. Seems unnecessary.”

“Let us not make any rash decisions right now.” Hannibal leaned down to place a small kiss on the tip of Will’s nose. Just as he expected, Will forgot all about his troubles when faced with the action, stunned. He said it was too saccharine for his tastes. Hannibal knew better. “Why don’t you go upstairs and take a bath? Leave all the rest to me.”

“All the rest of what?” Will asked. He stood up, but because Hannibal did not step back, he ended up chest to chest with him. Hannibal observed the slight dilation in his pupils, and congratulated himself on apparently having mastered the art of distracting Will Graham. He leaned in a fraction and watched Will’s gaze promptly slide down to his lips, and smiled.

“Never ask, darling Will,” he murmured and finally stepped back, going for the fridge with a confident gait. “It spoils the surprise.”

He then proceeded to ignore the “Prick,” murmured under Will’s breath, and got to work.

*

Will had expected to find Hannibal in the bedroom after his bath, with perhaps dinner in bed and the promise for more of the massage he started in the kitchen. When the room proved to be empty, he put on only a pair of boxers and began his search for Hannibal.

He found him downstairs, in the study, on the cloud sofa. As expected, a bed tray of finger food and condiments was ready, and as definitely not-expected, Hannibal was reclining back on the sofa with the TV remote in his hand.

“Will,” he said without tearing his eyes from the television mounted on the far wall. “I was hoping to have everything ready before you came, but I cannot seem to determine which of these is the least intellectually stimulating. It all seems the same to me.”

Will let himself take in the sight for a couple of seconds. From the worn, maroon t-shirt Hannibal wore because Will liked him in casual clothes and the bed tray filled with what Hannibal did not consider dinner material but served now because Will enjoyed them, to the cosy environment and the television and the simple wonder of this man, *this man, this man...*

And all of this because Will had a bad day at work.

He pitied the years he spent not knowing what it really was like to love and be loved with such intensity. It was a humbling experience.

So it was with the renewed appreciation for his life and with his heart feeling like it tripled in size that Will approached the sofa. He moved the tray away before carefully getting under the soft blanket and snuggling into Hannibal's side, marvelling at how Hannibal's arm, seemingly without his awareness, wrapped itself around his shoulder to welcome him. It was instinctual, it seemed, how they accepted and invited each other into their spaces, and Will hoped that he never got used to it and stopped appreciating Hannibal.

"Feeling better?" Hannibal asked, half turning his head towards Will so his lips grazed his forehead when he spoke, but otherwise still engrossed in his search for the trashiest show. Will tightened his arm around his chest and, pressed a kiss on his heart over the t-shirt.

"Much better. Thank you."

The arm around him squeezed him once, and Will thought Hannibal went through enough trouble. Taking the remote from him, he checked a few channels before deciding on a show where a bunch of men received lectures on how to pick up women, and then went out test what they learned on unsuspecting women.

"Frantic misogyny, Will?" Will felt Hannibal's amused huff warm him.

"Can't go any less intellectually stimulating than that," he replied, and let himself be enveloped into a close embrace.

The fact of the matter was that neither were paying attention to the television. They were quite mindful of the other's heat, their breathing, the calm and quiet of the evening surrounding them, this home they've built for themselves, this new life they enjoyed together. For both of them, what once seemed impossible was not their everyday reality, and it was good.

Almost too good to be true. *Was it true?*

"Do you miss it?" Will asked.

"Hmm?"

"Getting into people's heads? Manipulating them, playing the game, whatever you wanna call it. Do you miss it?"

Hannibal craned his neck, prompting Will to raise his and meet his eyes. "Where did this come from?"

"I just…" Will shook his head minutely. "It feels, sometimes, that everything is exactly how I want them to be. Like everything we do is for *me*. But this… Is this you? Don't you want what you had, before? You could convince your patients to kill their fiancés, flaunt yourself to your socialite peers, get married in a museum? Am I-" Will cut his unintended rant for a deep breath, bringing up a hand to rub his face. "Do you deny yourself to please me?"

Hannibal narrowed his eyes and licked his lips before sitting up and turning fully towards Will, who mirrored his pose.

“Darling Will,” he began, holding Will’s left hand in both his and running a thumb across it slowly. “In all the time you have known me, have I done anything that I did not want?”

“It’s different now-”

“Is it?” Hannibal interrupted, uncharacteristically, although his tone remained soft and low. “Do you ever deny yourself, or do things you don’t want to do just to please me?”

Will paused to think about that. Of course being together and living together came with some changes. But he still fished, he still drank, still worked and had an army of dogs. They now hunted and ate together, and Will could not in any way classify it as something he did to please Hannibal. His life fit right into their life together. Sure, he was being more careful to keep the house clean. Using a lint roller had become a second nature for him by now, for example. He did not drink himself to sleep like he used to, he took care to dress with more care for Hannibal’s viewing pleasure, he gave up microwave food… But none of these were bothersome. If anything, they were daily reminders of all he had and the lengths he was willing to go to keep it.

“But you are not like me,” Will said at last, going straight over his answer to the crux of the matter. “You socialized, hosted dinner parties, went to galleries with your friends and whatnot. You don’t do those anymore.”

“So I don’t,” Hannibal replied, an upward curl to his lips. He knew that Will knew that this was a weak argument, but he obligingly explained. “When I did *those*, Will, I was unaware of the kind of life I could live. I was unaware that I could be matched and challenged, that someone like you could exist. It was fun, and I could do those again, but it was not fulfilling and I had long given up hope that anything could be. The extravagance, the grandeur… While I enjoyed them immensely, for they served their purpose of presenting an alluring trap, it was a façade, Will. I don’t need that anymore. And do you know why?”

“Why?” Will asked, feeling a touch embarrassed that he opened the conversation now.

“Because I see you, you see me, and nothing I used to do can compete with that.” Hannibal lifted their hands to place a kiss on Will’s knuckles. “I have everything I need and want, my love, right here.”

“So you don’t want to get married in a museum?” Will asked, his concerns assuaged.

“We can go, right now, as we are, and sign those papers in a run-down office for all I care, *mylimasis*.”

Will felt a blush coming under Hannibal’s devoted gaze, and bent his head down, effectively breaking the eye contact. “I am not walking down any aisle in my underpants, Hannibal.”

“And that is a tragedy,” was his mock-serious answer. Will rolled his eyes at them both, and placed his free hand on Hannibal’s. “Now, I’m going to ask you to, please, try and push your

client out of your head. While I take immense pleasure at reassuring any and every concerns you might have, her insecurities have no place in your beautiful mind."

Will held his breath at the revelation the comment caused, and released it suddenly, his entire posture sagging with it. "God, fuck, yes. This has her written all over it. Damn it." He allowed Hannibal to hold him again, feeling his laughter against himself. "It has been so long since I've been in the field, I didn't even realize…"

"That you are empathizing with a fretful young woman who hired a PI for her polygamous, unfaithful fiancé?"

"Fuck," was Will's reply. "Why didn't you say anything before?"

"I am, as we both know, a very selfish creature, Will. That I like it when you are vulnerable in the safety of our home and under controllable conditions should not be a surprise for either of us. Especially after all that we've been through."

"I get it now," Will said as he extracted himself from the embrace. "You get all your entertainment from playing with me and me alone." He took the bed tray before himself, changed the channel to a competitive cooking show and leaned against the plush back of the sofa, settling in. "And now you have to watch this garbage with me."

Hannibal took in the indignant air, the one brow lifted in challenge, the damp hair curling as it dried, the stab wound in his shoulder hidden by the scar from when Jack shot him, and thought to himself that he must have done something very right (or very wrong) to please a particularly unpredictable but benevolent god to be exactly where he was. "May I feed you?"

Will took a piece of fried chicken and stuffed it into his mouth, and talked while chewing. "Don't push it."

*

They fell asleep at the sofa to one of those an hour-long ad breaks, limbs tangled and the tray abandoned on the floor. They usually tried to go to bed if they could be bothered, but this was not one of those nights, and if Hannibal Lecter could let dirty dishes sit overnight while they slumbered, so could Will.

What Will could not stand was Abigail in pain.

They jerked awake when the front door slammed shut and fast footsteps sounded. By the time Hannibal and Will darted up and out of the room, they only saw the blurry shape of what was undoubtedly Abigail running up the stairs. She slammed the door to her vacant room shut behind herself, and left them in an echoing silence.

"I'll talk to her," Will said, the first to take action. A glance down revealed that Hannibal had grabbed the heavy stag sculpture from the desk on his way out. "You make tea."

"Tea?" Hannibal stared at Will with incomprehension.

“You’re right, tea won’t do. Hot chocolate,” Will said, and left him to go up the stairs. He went into their bedroom to put on the first robe he could find -Hannibal’s-, and knocked on Abigail’s door gently.

“Abigail?” He said, careful to keep his tone calm. “May I come in?” No answer. “I only want to make sure you are alright.” Still no answer. “I’m coming in.”

He opened the door slowly, and in the darkness of the room, managed to see Abigail laying down on her bed. He made to turn on the light, but was stopped with a small, “Don’t,” from Abigail.

“Okay,” he said, and took measured steps towards the bed. “But Abigail, you know what leaving me hanging does. I need to see you if you don’t want me in full paranoid mode.”

A hand reached out to turn on the bedside lamp, and Will hungrily took in every detail he could. There was no blood, no torn clothes, no other signs of struggle or harm. What there was, however, eyes red and swollen from crying, and tear tracks down her cheeks.

“It’s not a big deal, really,” Abigail said, pulling the comforter over herself haphazardly. “I just couldn’t stay there. I didn’t mean to wake you guys up.”

Will chose not to mention the counterproductive nature of slamming doors in the middle of the night where one knew two very dangerous men lived. A glance at the clock revealed that it was almost half past two in the morning. “Tell me what happened,” he said instead, still calm but allowing a bit of firmness to reach through. It made Abigail meet his eyes for a second.

“I told her,” she said meekly. The whites of her eyes were red, making her blue irises pop. She looked so small and fragile that Will wanted simultaneously to hold her close and bleed anyone who ever dared to make her cry. He breathed deeply through his nose and tried to stay composed. Regardless of the instinctive protective drive, he had very little actual desire to kill Lily. Unless she deserved it.

“What exactly have you told her?” He prompted when Abigail remained quiet.

“My real name,” she said. “The Shrike. My parents.” A sob interrupted her already stilted explanation. “Everything, Will,” she said, her voice breaking on his name.

“Does she-” Will sat on the bed next to her and reached out to hold her shoulder. “Does she know about the Harbinger? About us?”

“No, of course not,” Abigail began to shake her head vehemently. “Just that you guys took care of me after what happened. I wouldn’t… Not to you, just me, I-”

“It’s okay, Abigail,” Will said. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Hannibal approach with a steaming cup of hot chocolate. He placed it on the dresser by the lamp, and dragged the armchair by the window to the bed. “Sit up, come on. Drink this,” Will reached for the cup and held it until Abigail could take it from him. Her hair was in a disarray, from grabbing it

or from the bed, Will did not know. He watched her take a reluctant sip, and took the opportunity to pet her hair down.

Under Abigail's skittish gaze, Hannibal sat down on the armchair he brought. He leaned forward and placed his elbows on his knees, hands entwined under his chin. The light from the lamp illuminated half his face, leaving the other half in shadows. He was the picture of confident competence and potential violence. "I understand that Miss Thomas has been made privy to your past, Abigail, is that correct?"

They all knew what a shift from Lily to Miss Thomas might mean for Hannibal. With her legs drawn into her body and her hands wrapped around the cup, Abigail nodded.

"How did she react?" Hannibal continued. They made a half circle around the lamp, the three of them close and speaking in hushed tones.

"She, uh," Abigail took a moment to compose herself, visibly fighting another sob. When she spoke again, it was in a whisper. "She said she needed time. To figure out how to proceed. She said she was... Not sure who I was anymore."

Will felt Hannibal's eyes slide to him, but did not turn to him. "Did she say she would report you?" He asked instead. "Do you think she would do that?"

"No, no, I don't think so, but I don't know. Please don't kill her," she said, and this time lost her fight against the tears. Hannibal rescued the cup from her before it could spill, and placed it back on the dresser.

"Nobody is killing anybody," Will stated with an air of finality. He could feel the frown on his face burrowing into his skull. It was heart-breaking to see that they were inadvertently adding to Abigail's stress this way. He moved up on the bed and pulled her in. Her tears would no doubt leave stains on the silk robe, but let Hannibal face the consequences himself if he ever commented on it.

"While this appears to have placed us in a precarious position, I must admit that Miss Thomas is entitled to her reaction," Hannibal said at length. "Experience has shown that it would not be wise to try and shape the desired outcome. I suggest, dear Abigail, that it is best to let her think, and come to you on her own volition."

They exchanged a loaded look, and Will nodded. "We know her now. She loves you. Even if she decides to end your relationship," Will said, tightening his hold when Abigail's sobs increased, "Even if that happens, I am reasonably sure that she would not intentionally cause you harm."

"And if she does," Hannibal picked up where Will left off, "we have options. The rules that bind the ordinary men and women do not hold us down. One way or another, we will prevail. Do not forget that."

Hannibal's words rang out while Will stroked Abigail's arm, willing their presence to be enough to calm her. Eventually, after what felt like an eternity for Will, her breathing evened out.

“Thank you,” she said, and waited until Will released her. She glanced from Will to Hannibal, and down at her hands. “I… Thank you. I think I’d like to sleep now.”

“Of course,” Hannibal got up and looked down at them on the bed. “We will be in our room if you need us.” Will nodded at him and, understanding the message, Hannibal quietly left the room, giving them an opportunity to talk a bit more.

“Let me ask you one last thing, Abigail,” Will waited until Abigail nodded to continue. “Did she find out, or did you decide to tell her yourself?”

“We were getting ready for bed, and she called me Aubrey like she does when she’s joking around, and I… I blurted it all out. I’d been wanting to tell her for some time. I do love her, Will,” she said, her lip wobbling slightly. “I wanted no lies between us. Well, less lies.”

At her sheepish addition, Will smiled. “Let me be the first one to say that the truth is a hard pill to swallow, especially when it involves cannibalism and serial murder.” The snort that got from Abigail was a reassuring sign that she would be alright. “And while I cannot tell the future, I’d like to think I am a good judge of character, what with the empathy disorder and all that jazz.” Another huff of breath, and Abigail finally raised her eyes to his. Will let his smile grow. “I have found that honesty and love work wonders about acceptance. I am almost certain that Lily will find it so as well,” he said, emphasizing Lily’s name. “I am proud of you for choosing honesty, Abigail.”

“It feels like a mistake,” she said, like she was telling him a secret. “What if she decides I’m just not worth the trouble?”

“Do not assume what she would or would not do. Let her process this, and when we know her decision, we will act accordingly. I know,” Will sighed, “that you are afraid of losing her. But right now, she feels as though she never even had you. One thing is working very much in your favour, though. Would you like to know what?”

“What?” Abigail asked, brows furrowed in confusion. Will smirked.

“You did not frame her for murder and place her in an asylum. If I managed to come back from that…”

Abigail groaned and pushed him away. “God, you’re so fucked up! Get out!”

Will did as he was asked, proud that he got her to smile even the tiniest bit. “Night, Abigail,” he said, and with Abigail’s reply in kind, he shut her door and went to the bedroom.

“You and your daughter,” Hannibal started from his place in bed, his tablet in his hand, “have a lot in common. I am only glad that the doors are of sturdy material. By my foresight, of course. Otherwise, they would not have been able to handle the amount of slamming you two put them through.”

Letting the robe fall to ground as Hannibal watched, Will felt a sliver of vindication. “Oh she’s my daughter now, huh? What about the similarities between the two of you?”

“Do you mean our charming personalities?” Hannibal asked, watching Will crawl under the covers.

“Try your penchant for hiding and revealing identities.” Reaching for the tablet and taking a look at the news himself, Will refreshed the page to see if there were anything new. As expected, nothing mentioned an Abigail Hobbs. He put the tablet away and turned to face Hannibal. “I would have gone to commiserate with Lily and talk shit about the two of you, but alas, I doubt I would be welcome right now.”

“The parallels are obvious to me,” Hannibal said, moving to his side to rest his head on one hand, while the other brushed the hair out of Will’s eyes. “But they are not us.”

“Small miracles,” Will said, nuzzling into the hand caressing his hair.

“You are a lot calmer than I expected,” Hannibal murmured, shifting a bit closer.

“Am I? Well, perhaps experience has taught me stuff too.”

“Like?”

“Like the fact that we got to know Lily, and that I would not have appreciated it if my dad had ended up killing you with that shovel. Think of all the fun we’d have missed out on.” Will turned to kiss the palm of Hannibal’s hand, and settled down further. “It’s not Abigail’s past, before us, that is the problem here. It’s that it was hidden. I don’t think this is something they cannot overcome. I’m not worried, but just in case, let’s talk to Lionel about getting another ID for Abigail.”

“The three of us each have two more to spare, to be activated upon requirement.” Hannibal’s smug smile was, Will had to admit, quite earned. “I did tell you I am provident, Will.”

Will, however, was not in a mood to admit that. “Did you also foresee that I will burn all your designer suits if I find that you are hiding another identity from me?”

“I had not, but thank you for letting me know.” Hannibal’s entire demeanour turned subtly playful. “I will, from now on, try harder to keep my wife and children hidden from you.”

Will had been joking, and he knew deep down that Hannibal was only escalating the humorous back and forth. However, when the image of faceless women and their many faceless children flashed before Will’s eyes, he felt a sudden change in his blood pressure. “Hannibal-”

“At least they don’t make me watch subpar reality TV shows,” Hannibal continued to poke. “And they are strictly against pets in the house.”

Will pushed Hannibal at the shoulder, watching with no trace of satisfaction as Hannibal rolled to lay on his back with a straight face. “I’d kill you I swear-”

“*And* they don’t threaten me with murder. Honestly, Will, the competition is rather high. Better try not to be so rude,” Hannibal said, and raised an eyebrow when Will, in the blink of

an eye, straddled him, his knees digging Hannibal's forearms into the bed and effectively immobilizing him.

"I'll show you rude," Will growled, and took care to be as quiet as possible in order not to disturb Abigail while he endeavoured to remind Hannibal just what kind of a possessive monster he was dealing with here.

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Abigail did not want to return to her apartment, probably because it had become a place she and Lily had begun to spend most of their days and nights together. It had become *their place*, and she did not want to be there alone. This decision was unspoken, but wholeheartedly supported by Will and Hannibal. They took in the hunched stance, low shoulders and sullen face, and decided that the best course of action to support her through this tough time was by providing her with anything she may want.

The first things she wanted were her clothes and books from the flat. And so, while Will stayed at home with her, Hannibal drove by himself to fulfil her request. And even though Abigail had reassured him that the place would be vacant, he came to find Lily there, curled on the armchair by the window and wrapped up in a thin blanket. He had not been trying to be quiet, so his entrance was noticed immediately. They had an awkward moment staring at each other before manners urged Hannibal to speak.

"Miss Thomas," he said, the deferential greeting feeling right on his tongue. He was quite particular on decorum, but he was also a dramatic person as Will loved to remind him at regular intervals. It was one thing to be kind, and another entirely to ignore that this young woman was the reason Abigail skipped some meals. He often let Will take the brunt of being labelled as the overprotective parent, but everyone in their ragtag family knew that Hannibal was not entirely innocent of the notion. "I was not expecting you to be here."

"Me neither," Lily answered. She looked dejected; her contemplation was disturbed and she undoubtedly noticed her changing title. Her hands reached for the edge of the blanket and she began to fiddle with it. "I should go."

"Do not depart on my account. I will retrieve Abigail's possessions and leave promptly." Hannibal emphasized the name, and with a nod, went about the studio apartment to do just that. He was aware of Lily's existence in the open space, and as she contradicted her statement and stayed exactly where she was, he dwelled upon the situation. Had the stakes not been this high, he would have tried to draw Lily into a conversation to steer her towards a mind-set he favoured. As it was, he respected, understood, and agreed with Will's suggestion to be non-intrusive. He was also curious to see what would happen; would Lily choose and find her way back to Abigail, or would love cease to matter in the face of dishonesty and secrets?

It was when the bag he brought with himself was almost filled with Abigail's clothes that Lily broke the silence. "Did she help her father, like that journalist woman says?"

Hannibal straightened from where he was picking up Abigail's textbooks and looked back at her. She was still sitting, still under her blanket, but instead of dejection, the hard set of her

jaw and the frown marring her forehead radiated frustration.

“Even if it were my place to know and share,” Hannibal said after a lengthy pause, “I wonder what difference that would make.”

“It should make some difference,” Lily said, her chin lifting fractionally in the face of Hannibal’s serenity.

“Not to us,” Hannibal replied. Her fiery righteousness reminded him of Will when they first met. He too had been adamant to hold onto his morality and sense of decency, and he too, had struggled with what his gut told him actually mattered. “She’s family, Miss Thomas,” he continued when he did not receive a reply.

“Will is not really her uncle. There’s no relation whatsoever between any of you. How could you…” she drifted off, probably due to her not completely believing what she was saying. Also probably because of Hannibal’s face shutting off, leaving only a bland mask. “It should matter,” she repeated instead, even though it was apparent that she was unnerved. Hannibal appreciated the bravery.

“For your sake as well as everyone involved, Miss Thomas, ask yourself who it is you are trying to convince here.” Hannibal turned to place the books on top of the clothes, and zipped up the bag. “And for whom you are seeking justice by judging and rejecting her: The victims of her father, or yourself?” Hannibal gripped the straps of the bag and nodded once in her general direction before walking towards the door. He had all the right words to say on the tip of his tongue, words that would tip her over to a side that would be conducive for her reunion with Abigail. But, with considerable difficulty, he had chosen an albeit cool prod towards self-exploration for her. “If you find the answers, then you know who to call, and where to find her. Have a pleasant day,” he said, and without a backward glance, left Lily alone in the flat she unofficially shared with Abigail.

*

“Alright, fess up, what’s going on?”

Both of Will’s eyebrows rose without his express assent. They had been having a convivial discussion on Beau’s day when the man rolled his eyes and said this.

“I… Don’t understand,” Will said slowly.

Beau’s snort preceded his equally disbelieving reply. “You thought you were doing a good job, huh? Thought you could hide from me?” Will remained silent. “Abigail thinks so, too, you know. I let you two do as you wished for once since you didn’t seem to want to share, but it has been a week but whatever it is, you haven’t managed to fix it. So. What is it?”

Will was honestly impressed, both because his father managed to see that they were troubled, and because he managed not to prod and poke for an entire week. He idly wondered if this was in any way due to Madeleine’s influence, but chose to dwell upon that later.

“Dad,” he began. “It’s not mine to share.”

“So this is about Hannibal or Abigail? Not that it matters,” Beau said, though the video call showed Will that he lost some of the tension in his shoulders. “Spill.”

“Well,” Will sighed. Beau would not let things go now that he knew something was up, and he honestly did not want it to be Abigail who told him, being reminded of everything again and again. Some might say he was coddling her and being overly protective, but Will honestly did not care what he was as long as he could spare Abigail’s feelings. He let himself burrow into his seat further. “It’s just that… Lily knows about Abigail’s parents, now.”

“Oh,” was all Beau said for some time. Will knew that Abigail had shared with Beau what happened to her on that evening when Hannibal found him, swept him off his feet, and revealed her to him. While the exact details of her talk with Beau was unknown to Will, he was certain that Beau listened and accepted it all with a nod and poorly disguised compassion. He was precious like that.

“And she did not take it well,” Will continued, “but Hannibal came across Lily the other day and they spoke, and I believe she just needs some time to… digest.”

“And Abigail? She’s staying with you?”

“Yes, dad, she’s here. And she’s upset. And when she’s upset-”

“You are upset too,” Beau interrupted gruffly. “I know the drill.”

And it was obvious that he really did know, because as Will looked at his father on the phone screen, he saw that the wrinkles on the old man’s face had turned more pronounced, mouth line curving downwards, eyes heavier.

“Dad, it’s fine,” Will began, but amended with, “It’s *going* to be fine. They are young, and they are dealing with things most adults never have to deal with.”

“Not you, though, right son?” Will watched Beau run a hand through his grey hair and shake his head. “Nor your man. No, you don’t deal with anything easy.”

Will considered this in silence. While what Beau was saying was definitely correct, he pondered upon how much Beau knew about their life, kept a secret from the entire world by him, Hannibal and Abigail. He had alluded to his dad that they were not exactly the most lawful or tame people in the world, but considering the man’s perceptiveness and intelligence, Will knew that Beau knew more than he was letting on. The downside to their lifestyle, however, was constant diligence and secrecy.

“We are particularly equipped to deal with quite a lot,” he conceded.

“And Lily,” Beau asked, his eyes straying somewhere behind the phone, a silent warning for Will that he was not alone anymore. “Do you think she’s ‘equipped’ as well?”

“I have a feeling she will be.”

“Is that Will?” Madeleine leaned into the frame, and Beau adjusted the angle so she was included. She looked as though she was about to go into a business meeting with her hair up,

a tasteful neckpiece and square neck blouse. “Hello, Will. How are you?”

“I’m fine, Madeleine, and you?” Will said, so polite all of a sudden. He was unerringly distant around her, shields up to heavens, and he could not find it in himself to behave any differently.

“Oh, I’m alright. I came to pick Beau up so we could check out a venue by the lake. The pictures in their website are simply *dreamy*, but it is necessary to personally go and check. I would be so upset if the wedding is anything less than perfect!”

“I-” It was so damn awkward to talk to her. “Thank you, Madeleine,” he said, once again channelling his inner Hannibal. “I appreciate all the work you put into this.”

“Don’t mention it, Will,” she said, one hand going to her chest like she was touched. She might very well be, Will thought, because he was very sparing with his compliments to her. He pushed aside a sliver of guilt at keeping her at arm’s length. “I will send the details to Hannibal.”

“Thank you,” he said, and was quick to change the topic because he was simply done. “I should go and see if Abigail wants to do anything.”

“Take her shopping,” Beau said. “She loves shopping.”

Will and Hannibal had bent over backwards to distract her from staring gloomily at her phone, and this included many visits to art galleries, fishing trips, and a few dancing performances (not theatre, because, well, Lily.) In all their elaborations, shopping had not come to mind.

“Right,” he said, berating himself for not having thought of this before and thankful to Beau for being so insightful. “Will do.”

Goodbyes were said and the call was ended. Will spent a few minutes thinking over the entire situation. It had been a week since Abigail stormed into the house in tears, eight days to be precise, and while there had been no word from Lily, there also had not been any breaking news about the fact that Abigail Hobbs was alive and kicking in Paris, France. Unless journalists were holding onto the information for whatever unlikely reason, this meant that Lily was not particularly inclined to expose Abigail.

Will understood her thoroughly. However, he was also careful not to project his own thoughts, feelings and motivations upon her. While he could make more than the average educated guesses about their predicament, he also went over all the possible scenarios with Hannibal and assured himself as well as Abigail of their contingency plans. He would not let his hope for a future for them in Paris, with Lily, ruin what he had with Abigail and Hannibal.

He would burn the world to the ground before he let that happen.

“Hey,” he said, knocking on Abigail’s door and. When she replied in kind, he opened it. Abigail was on her desk before her laptop, her phone conveniently within reach, her hair a wild mess. She must have just gotten up, which at 3 pm was a bit alarming. “Wanna shop?”

“You know what,” she said, finally looking excited for something Will offered for them to do, with a light in her eyes that had not been there before. “Give me half an hour to get ready.”

Will smiled, silently thanked his dad again, and nodded. “You know where to find me.”

*

“Don’t get me wrong,” Will said, when the limb dropped and he turned off the bone saw. “She was very happy. But I just don’t understand…”

“What don’t you understand, *mylimasis*?” Hannibal approached him from behind and wrapped his arms around Will’s waist, inspecting over his shoulder the mess in their ‘murder basement’. It was a habit of Will, one he picked up from Abigail, to put ‘murder’ before names in order to describe their significance. They wore ‘murder suits’ and took their ‘murder van’ to go on ‘murder trips’. It was such a divergence from the usual eloquence of the man that Hannibal, even though he made a point to glare at him whenever he used the terms, could not help but find it adorable.

Will sighed and leaned into Hannibal’s embrace. “Shopping cannot possibly be more therapeutic than *this*.” He waved an idle hand above the surgical table before them, and the dismembered corpse of the fiancé on it. “She refuses to partake. She never did that before.”

“You fear she’s associating our activities with her rejection, that she will distance herself from us,” Hannibal murmured into the crook of Will’s neck, his breath warming the skin there. “Regard us with shame and regret.”

Taking off his bloody gloves and disposable surgical apron and throwing them to the far corner, Will turned and faced Hannibal. “Remind me again why I’m marrying a psychiatrist of all things?”

“Whatever the reason, I am forever grateful for it,” Hannibal said. Under the brash surgical lighting, the few splashes of blood that bypassed the apron and landed on Will’s cheek looked stark. Inviting. He raised a hand to thumb at the drops, spreading the crimson across Will’s skin. He really looked magnificent covered in red. “And Abigail is well-versed in our familial dynamics, my love. If she wished to distance herself, she knows she can talk to us. That it is safe.”

“That you wouldn’t cut off her other ear?” Will asked, leaning into Hannibal’s touch on his face and looking up at him through his eyelashes. “That I wouldn’t slash her neck open?”

“Precisely.” Hannibal let his free arm find the small of Will’s back and pulled, just slightly, just enough that they could feel each other’s warmth more. “Do you feel better now? Was tonight therapeutic for *you*?”

Will looked over his shoulder at the table, and back at Hannibal. “It was, it really was. Thank you for doing this with me.”

“Never thank me for basking in your radiance, *mylimasis*.” Hannibal leaned in, burying his nose in Will’s curls and inhaled deeply, revelling in the scents of exhilaration and a peculiar

kind of afterglow that he only caught after their hunts. Here, in Hannibal's arms, with another's blood on his person and his content sigh in Hannibal's ear, was his entire world. "We should, however, refrain from targeting any more persons related to the cases you take on," he saw fit to remind. "At least for the time being."

"Alright," Will murmured. "But we'll keep them in the rolodex, right? For future reference?"

Reaching to bring up Will's left hand, Hannibal chuckled. "You know I cannot refuse you when you ask so nicely," he said, and placed a kiss on Will's ring.

"I love that we are so wrapped around each other's fingers that it is not possible to distinguish us anymore," Will said, a small smile on his face at Hannibal's reverence towards their bond.

"Some might call us co-dependent," Hannibal said with an affectation of clinical detachment.

"I prefer *conjoined*," Will said, and leaned in for a kiss. Hannibal cherished Will's closeness, his daring in seeking that closeness. This kiss, just as the others, felt like a benediction, an affirmation that Hannibal did not stay idly by and let life pass him by. No, he got to know himself, knew what would make him happy, and chased after it relentlessly. That single-minded determination to make a place for himself in the world gave him Will. Closing his eyes and giving into Will's demands that he part his lips, Hannibal let himself enjoy the kiss unabashedly.

It fuelled Will further as well, because he let his hands wander down Hannibal's back, stopping only to squeeze his buttocks with considerable strength. The pain of it, so familiar, was pleasurable as well, and Hannibal seriously considered continuing where this was going and letting the meat go bad, if only to have Will like this; victorious from his hunt and desirous of his mate.

"Will-" he said, holding a hand to Will's chest and pausing the kiss before it escalated any further.

Pressing their foreheads together, Will breathed, "Yeah, I know. I told you not to touch me when we are down here, but you never listen, do you?" He chuckled, fond. "Keep expecting me to choose between food and you, Hannibal, and one of these days I won't be able to choose the food."

"That is a loss we will deal with when it happens," Hannibal said. He was being honest in his own way by not assuring Will that he would restrain himself from touching him, and they both knew it. Will pressed a closed-lipped kiss to his temple, stepped to the side, and walked to the other side of the table where the remaining leg was waiting to be extracted. They both donned new gloves and apron, and together, in silence broken only by the bone saw, they got back to work.

*

While Will carried on with his PI work, Hannibal applied for their marriage in the States and cooperated with Madeleine for the wedding, and Abigail continued to go to school. Her dedication to her education and learning French was commended by Hannibal, although Will

knew that while that might be part of her motivation, a significant part was the hope that to see Lily in the campus. If she ever did, she did not share it with them, but the continued glances at her phone during the time they spent together in the evenings was enough for Will to think that she had no such luck. It was heart-breaking to a certain extent, but their non-interference policy remained steadfast.

“Did you call Will?” Abigail asked, out of the blue, on the evening she had her proficiency exam and the spring semester ended officially. “After he left?”

Hannibal and Will exchanged a glance while she continued to stare at her plate, her steak now nothing more than minced meat.

“I did not,” Hannibal replied. This lifted her eyes, and she met Hannibal’s with a barely concealed glare.

“Why not?” she asked, jaw tight around the words.

Hannibal tilted his head to the side in consideration; not of his reply, but of Abigail’s rage. Will could practically see the gears turning in his head, trying to find the best way to utilize the emotion for a path befitting him. Will subtly kicked him at the shin in warning.

“Ours was not a conversation to be had over the phone,” Hannibal replied then. “And I needed to come to terms with certain things as well.”

It was true. Hannibal had to weigh whether the lifestyle and the person suit he so meticulously built for himself was worth being altered or demolished for Will. And while it sounded so very impersonal when one thought about it, it was anything but. At the time, it had been unimaginable for Will that Hannibal would, or ever could, even *consider* distancing himself from his web of manipulation and deception for him. But he had. He did.

And look how far they had come.

Will held himself from reaching to take Hannibal’s hand in his, knowing that the displays of affection would be no comfort to Abigail at the moment. So he opted for the knee, and squeezed lightly to show his appreciation. Hannibal, for his part, kept his face straight, but did move his leg closer to relay that he got it.

“Well, I think I’m done,” said Abigail, once again glaring down. “I don’t want to wait anymore.”

“Are you gonna call her?” Will asked.

“Oh no,” Abigail reached for her phone, placed on the seat of the chair next to her. “I’m turning this off. I can’t live like this.” She kept pressing the button at the side of the thing, and it would have been comical how much it seemed like she was waiting for someone to asphyxiate rather than turning off her phone, if it was not for the apparent importance the act held for her. “There,” she said, swallowed, and after one moment of hesitation, put the phone away again.

“And if she can’t reach you?” Hannibal asked.

“Then she can come find me,” Abigail replied, finally gathering some of the food on her fork, chin high. “I refuse to be ashamed. I’m not guilty because I chose to survive. I’m guilty for other things. If she cannot accept me with what she knows, then I guess… She’s not the right person for me.” Her voice tightened when she said that, but she shoved her fork into her mouth, chewing with vehemence. She raised her wide eyes to Will, disarming him at the sight of the roiling emotions therein.

“Take me to Beau,” she said simply.

“I’ll book the tickets,” Will nodded, and it was as simple as that.

Chapter 2

“Stop.”

The magic word. Well, no, the real magic word was “kintsugi” but this was not that kind of a night. Hannibal froze behind Will, and Will shook his head to convey that he was fine. “I want to see you,” he said.

Hannibal ran his hand from Will’s hips to his shoulders and back, reverent, before withdrawing. He stroked himself as Will turned to lay on his back, opening his legs, exposing himself for Hannibal’s eyes to feast upon. Hannibal, never one to miss the chance, did so greedily; he took in Will’s reddened rim, the erection against his stomach, the liquid at the head that glistened and threatened to drip, the strain in the muscles in his stomach and chest at holding himself open, the sweat on his skin, the pronounced veins in his neck, the lips parted and red, and the eyes on him, equal parts aroused and absent.

“What’s on your mind, love?” Hannibal asked as he let Will’s feet on the small of his back guide him back in. He entered slowly, so slowly that he was surprised Will did not object. No, Will was watching him attentively, a different kind of intensity in the way his hands touched Hannibal’s shoulders and neck, allowing Hannibal to set the pace however he wanted.

“You,” Will replied finally. “You are always on my mind.” He pulled Hannibal’s head down then, into the place where his neck met his shoulder, and held him there as Hannibal continued to thrust, in and almost all the way out, ever so slowly. They had began by tearing each other’s clothes in their haste to get to skin, to touch and smell and bite and consume. The shift felt significant to Hannibal, although he could not yet pinpoint the reason. He adjusted his position, without moving from Will’s embrace, so that they were pressed together as closely as possible, letting the movement of his hips rub him along Will’s length and drawing low, breathy groans from him.

“What do you think about when you think about me?” Hannibal asked into the crook, tracing his lips along the veins in Will’s neck and feeling almost as though he could smell the blood there. Imaginary though the scent was, when it was mixed with the scent of Will and their coupling, it brought about a different kind of intimacy to the moment.

Will wrapped his legs tighter around Hannibal, causing the thrusts to shorten. “Fate,” Will replied and glided his fingers through Hannibal’s hair, grasping at it gently. “Fortune,” he added, tilting his head so Hannibal could kiss his neck with ease. “Forever,” he whispered with an air of finality, and Hannibal understood at once; the intensity of Will’s gaze, the tenderness in his touch, the quiet, underlying desperation that coloured his voice. Separation and sorrow had seeped into their home, filled every silence and shaped each of their interactions. It was only natural that it brought to mind the prospect of their own end regardless of how devoted they were to each other, how savagely they held on, and all the ways in which they deliberately tied themselves to the other.

The air around them felt brittle, as though it was not real and could, at any moment, shatter to reveal something unknown, something threatening. It simply would not do. Hannibal lifted his head and nosed at Will's chin until his wish was granted and their lips met. He turned them so he could cradle Will against his chest, his breath in his ear. Feet planted firmly on the bed, his thrusts became more forceful, keeping Will immobile and helpless against the onslaught. The friction of his movement on Will's cock increased as he pressed a hand on his waist as if trying to merge them into one being, sharing the same skin and breathing the same air. Will's moan rang in the room, high and clear, an agreement with Hannibal's motivation.

"Promise me," Will said, voice failing as Hannibal moved inside him, covered him, forced his breath out of his lungs. "Never let me go. Even if I run."

"Never," Hannibal growled, oxygen thin and accent heavy. He would have carried on still, explained how he would keep chasing Will to the ends of this world and the next and the next if he had to, but what little breath he had left was stolen when Will captured his lips, muffling his moan as he came between them. Under his lover's reassuring weight, with his lips bitten raw, and feeling all too in tune with his baser instincts to stop, Hannibal followed, his hips and breath stuttering as he emptied himself and filled Will, the exchange primal, familiar, reassuring.

He did not move, and he did not let Will more either, their breaths evening out while their bodies, sweaty and hot, remained interlocked.

"Would you?" he asked into the silence that followed. Will did not lift his head from where it was resting against his shoulder, but rubbed his temple against the skin there in question. "Run from me?" Hannibal clarified, tightening his hold on Will. There would be bruises, he knew. They both knew. Will melted into the embrace regardless, what little tension he held leaving him.

"No, not willingly," he murmured. "But I'd still like to know that you would not let me."

Hannibal lifted a hand to his hair, caressing the wet curls and admiring the way the jade in his ring glinted under the dim, warm light of the bedroom. "We are more than the two of us combined, my darling Will. What we have is not for either of us to abandon as he sees fit," he said. "I'd sooner kill you than let you go." He might sound ominous to anyone else, but to Will, the words felt like home.

"Me too," Will sighed, locking Hannibal's chest hair between his fingers. "It's such a shame that this can't be our vow."

Hannibal chuckled, the rumble going through them both. "Unconventional though they may be, that nobody else could appreciate them for their beauty does not mean these are not, in effect, our vows."

"Then you may now kiss the groom," Will murmured, and Hannibal gladly did just that.

*

“I’ve been considering making a sign to hang above the door,” Beau said as he ushered Abigail into the house, leaving Will and Hannibal to their own devices. “‘Papa Beau’s Home for the Broken Hearted’ has a nice ring to it, don’t ya think?”

Abigail held him for a long moment, making Will’s eyes sting in empathy. He busied himself with carrying his and Hannibal’s bags upstairs to the room that, sure enough, Beau left untouched for them. He rubbed his eyes, feeling angry at the world for not bending over backwards to accommodate them. They had to work so hard to carve out a place for themselves, while the alternative was conforming to the mundane and denying their true selves, wishes, whims, inclinations. Masks upon masks upon masks, it was making Will suffocate. If only he could chip away at them, *would she come back to me then-*

“Will,” someone said. Hannibal. He was holding Will at the wrists, and pulling them away from his smarting face. Will returned to himself in degrees, realized he’d been scratching at his face, and blinked at Hannibal.

“Hannibal, am I sick again?” He asked. He was not hallucinating, nor was he riddled with night terrors and sleepwalking, but these sudden bouts of encompassing empathy were unusual. He leaned his weight against Hannibal when he leaned in to sniff at him.

“I do not think so,” Hannibal said. “At least, I cannot detect anything. Would you like for me to make an appointment?”

“No, not really,” Will said. “I don’t understand. I used to be able to… Not turn it off, exactly, but,” he drifted, trying to describe it. “Dim it down, I suppose.”

Hannibal had, likewise, been aware of a heightened concentration in Will’s experience of his empathetic episodes. It started long before he began his work as a PI, and showed no signs of stopping now, with Abigail in the state that she was.

“You were actively avoiding it, Will,” Hannibal said, “Distancing yourself from other people, isolating yourself. The conditions have changed drastically since then, wouldn’t you say?”

From living alone in a two story house in the middle of nowhere with only his dogs, to living with Hannibal and Abigail (and his dogs), bearing their lives as his own. Yes, he would say that a lot changed for him.

“You think that’s it?” He could not help but feel frustrated with himself for not being able to balance things out without concerning his family about his wellbeing. “This is ridiculous,” he sneered at no one in particular.

“I think it is only natural, my dear,” Hannibal said, a smile bright in his eyes. Will looked at him in askance.

“You… are enjoying this?” He asked with disbelief. “Why?”

“You have let yourself be open, Will. You let others see you, and in return, you see into others. This,” Hannibal said, tracing his fingertips lightly at Will’s temple, “is how you should have experienced the world all along. It is not a weakness, it is certainly not a

disorder," he said, a hissing quality emphasizing the last word. "It is majestic, my love, how well you are shedding your dead skin."

"So I'm the snake now," Will snorted. It felt good, at the very least, that at least one of them could enjoy Will's predicament. "What happened to the mongoose?"

"I gave my word that the rodent-that-shall-not-be-named shall remain unnamed." Hannibal's smile now reached his lips. It was endearing that he remembered their little quip from months ago, and the bastard was intentional in his reminder of it. Will obeyed the intent and let himself laugh. "The mirrors in your mind can reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of someone else, Will. If you become lost in your exploration, I will be right here to make sure you find your way back to me."

"Fostering co-dependency again, Doctor Lecter?" Will teased and decided to trust Hannibal's interpretation of the phenomenon for the time being. He went back to the bags to unpack.

"On the contrary, I'm merely-"

"Get your asses here right now!" Beau's booming shout sounded like he was in the room with them instead of downstairs with Abigail. "Don't make me remind you the rule again, because I will!"

Will left the bags at once to lightly hit his head against the wardrobe. Hannibal laughed and wrapped an arm around him to steer him out the room.

*

They had exactly until one pm to enjoy the early summer blooms in the garden, filled with new flower beds planted by Beau himself, before Madeleine descended on them.

"Will!" She clutched at her chest when he opened the door to her. "I- You- Hi!"

"Hello, uhm," Will cleared his throat, "Madeleine."

"They arrived a couple hours ago! A surprise visit, can you believe it?" Beau enthusiastically explained to her. He came to stand next to Will, and patted him on the back with hands that earned his living through heavy manual labour. Will hid his flinch well by fleeing back to the garden with a nod.

"That's wonderful!" Madeleine's voice followed him there. "Oh, Hannibal, Abigail, it's so wonderful to see you. Really, it's amazing," she said, reaching into her oversized shoulder bag to take out a stack of brochures and booklets, which she waved at them, "because I have a lot of new locations to go through!"

"For the wedding?" Abigail asked, already circling around Beau's handmade table to reach for the papers.

"But of course," she said, taking the seat at the head of the table and spreading the colourful papers on top of it, pushing aside empty glasses as she went. "Let's eliminate the bad, and choose from the rest which ones we'll visit today."

“Maddie, let them rest a bit. They just arrived,” Beau said. He didn’t mention that she took his seat, and sat on the chair closest to her with an indulgent smile.

“Nonsense,” she murmured, already involved in the first booklet of the day. “Hannibal, Will, what do you think about a yacht wedding?”

Will was grabbed by the arm when he tried to sneak back inside, and upon his dad’s “If *I’m* doin’ it, you ain’t goin’ anywhere, sonny,” he resigned himself to an afternoon of this. He consoled himself with the facts that a) Hannibal looked super amused and kept trying to rile him up by showing him pictures to places Will would never set foot in (like a manor, a heliport, and a gym of all things) and b) it cracked Abigail up each time he did that. By the time they all gathered into Will’s old car, now Beau’s, with Beau and Madeleine in the front and them at the back, Will was in an overall alright mood.

And by their third location, contrary to his stance so far, he could say that he was pretty involved.

“Why is everything so pretentious?” He said between gritted teeth, making Madeleine turn to him in alarm at the tone. Will gestured at the gold-leaf chairs with large wavy carvings with distaste. They were standing in the middle of a large room with ceiling length windows that overlooked the lake, filled with rectangular dining tables with twelve seats, and looking for all the world like the bastard child of rococo and baroque architecture. “I mean, who are we trying to impress? We don’t even have this many guests!”

Politely finalizing her conversation with the attendant, Madeleine came to stand by his side. “This is why we visit, Will,” she said, sparing a glance at the chairs Will was trying to glare holes into. “The pictures looked much less… Gaudy.”

Will turned to look at her, and saw way more than he wanted. She loved the place; it was exactly the kind of place where she’d want to get married. Perhaps she did get married in a place like this, what with the wealth and grandeur of her and her arranged husband’s families. She was used to the luxury, the ostentatious displays, the peacocking. She wanted Will to have what she thought was the best, and while she knew he did not like the grandeur, it kept slipping her mind, reverting back to the ideals she held. And, when reminded, she felt guilt for bringing him to a place like this. She, too, was struggling with their relationship, but wanted badly to better it.

“It’s okay,” he said, feeling a sense of defeat spreading in his gut. This, he believed, was the crumbling down of the last of his defences to hold up against her. “I trust that you’ll find us the best place. Just, something a bit toned down, how about that? I don’t want to feel like I’m on display at a cotillion.”

Madeleine looked at him for a beat, and then gave him the biggest smile he’d seen on her face yet. “Of course, Will. No cotillions for you.”

Will returned it with a weak smile. She squeezed his arm, still gentle and skittish, before nodding at him and going to gather Beau from the bar. Which was, of course, Hannibal’s cue to come and be quietly smug.

“Shut up,” Will murmured.

Hannibal said nothing, but reached to run a finger at the back of the gold chair, making an appreciative hum.

“God give me strength,” Will said under his breath, turned to go, and saw Abigail standing on the wide stage accepting a microphone from an amused attendant, looking for all the world like she was getting ready to rehearse *singing* for their wedding. A glance at Hannibal revealed that the man was approving of her antics, watching her with bright eyes. “Are you going to let this happen?”

“She seems very excited to give us a performance,” Hannibal said. “It certainly is a nice change from her sullen demeanour as of late, don’t you think?”

“I can’t believe- Hannibal. She sings in the shower. We both heard-”

Hannibal turned to regard him with one brow raised. “You would refuse her this tiny bit of happiness?”

“We’re not even gonna have it here!” Will said, riled up against his best efforts not to be. That was when Abigail’s off-key singing started, drawing all eyes on the massive room to her intentionally silly dance.

Doctor doctor, gimme the news, I got a bad caaaaase of lovin' youuuuu!
No pill's gonna cure my ill I've got a bad case of looooooovin' youuu!

Will closed both hands over his face. “You know Will,” Hannibal said, leaning in to be heard over Abigail’s, well, wails. “You worry too much. You'd be much more comfortable if you just relaxed with yourself.”

“I miss Wolf Trap,” Will said, watching from between his fingers as Beau recorded the entire thing on her phone. Madeleine was also laughing and clapping along. “I miss my dogs. I'm not going to miss any of you. I'm not going to find you. I'm not going to look for you. I don't want to know where you are or what you do. I don't want to think about you guys anymore.”

“Liar,” Hannibal said, and allowed Will to burrow into him, hiding his face effectively.

“Yeah,” Will sighed.

*

After their dinner back at home, Madeleine left them to go to her hotel. It surprised Will to learn that she had been living there since their visit during Abigail’s winter break, when Madeleine showed up in their lives. It was around five months since then, and except for a few short visits to Pittsburgh to see Brian, her other son, she had been occupying the same hotel room in New Orleans downtown, going to and fro. While she assured him that money was not a problem and that her agreement with the hotel was reasonable, Will felt it was not a nice way to live. He kept the thought to himself, though.

They made Abigail's bed on the living room couch, and Beau sat at the armchair by her head as she laid down. Beau gave Will and Hannibal a significant look, conveying his desire to be left alone with her so he could lend her an ear, so they left them to it and retreated to their room. Will, so tired from the flight and the wedding venues and the singing, took a quick shower before throwing himself to the bed naked. Hannibal went to take a shower after him, and although Will wanted to wait, he found himself drifting before he heard Hannibal get the shower running.

He woke, however, to a lick along the length of his cock.

"Hann-" he started, but was immediately shushed.

"I am breaking a sacred rule, my dear," Hannibal whispered from between his legs, "I would appreciate complicity in the form of your silence."

"Why are you breaking the rule?" Will asked dozily, but careful still to keep his voice down. His body had apparently not received the memo that his brain was exhausted, because it was coming alive under Hannibal's ministrations.

"You looked so tempting," Hannibal said. And he *would* find a sleeping Will, naked beneath flimsy quilts and open to Hannibal's advancements, enticing. "But also because of how well you did today." Another lick with a suck at the head had Will drawing in a sharp breath, hardening him with a quickness that almost made it ache. "You made amends with Madeleine-"

"Don't talk about *my mothe*-"

"And," Hannibal said, silencing him with a squeeze at his balls, "you were involved in the planning. It made me *weak*, Will." Tilting his head to the side, Hannibal mouthed along Will's cock, his hot and wet breath making Will muffle a moan with his fist. "I have been on the lookout for the opportunity to taste you since," Hannibal finished, and without further ado, went about to doing just that.

Hannibal let his mild, soft movements lull Will into a false sense of security for a minute or two, languidly licking and lapping at him, looking for all the world like he had no hurry before tightening his lips and sucking once, really hard. That was when Will realized that Hannibal, the sadist that he was, was not going to make being silent easy for Will.

"Ahh-" he said before slapping a hand over his mouth. He knew that Hannibal would have been smiling had his mouth not been otherwise occupied. And occupied it was. Throughout the duration of their romantic and sexual relationship, he had learned -just as Will had- all the ways in which he could *break* Will. His thumb was rubbing the sensitive skin right above the rim, tongue teasing on the down stroke and the pressure increasing on the way up. A glance revealed to Will exactly what he knew he would find; Hannibal, sucking greedily and stroking what he did not, his cheekbones looking out of this world, hungry heavy-lidded eyes on him, the light from the outside illuminating half his face and body, the muscles on his arms and back working as he did his goddamn best to get them caught.

“Hannibal,” Will breathed, knowing that he would be on edge for hours if Hannibal were to decide. “Come here,” he said, breathless and coy, because Hannibal was not the only one with tricks up his sleeve. He saw Hannibal consider this while giving a particularly hard suck at the head, and a broad lick across it for good measure. Will reached to caress his head, the hair beneath his fingers softer now that the gel had been washed away, just as he preferred. “Come on, darling.”

Hannibal obeyed; he was such a glutton for endearments. He used them with Will often enough but Will knew he liked it when he used them as well, so he tried to use them sparingly for the optimum effect. He watched Hannibal as he languidly crawled up the length of Will’s body and stood above him, on all fours, his lustful eyes going from his eyes to his lips as though he could not choose which one to focus on. Will raised his head to put an end to the indecision, and gave him an open mouthed filthy kiss, swallowing the hitch in Hannibal’s breath. Wrapping one arm around his neck and the other around his shoulders, Will pulled him down so they were chest to chest, groin to groin.

“If you wanted me involved,” Will said, raising his own hips to rub against Hannibal and get him going as well. “Why didn’t you say so in the beginning?”

Hannibal ground his hips down, letting their cocks slide next to each other, and stole another kiss before replying. “I wanted to see what you would do.”

“I would do anything for you,” Will’s lips touched Hannibal’s as he whispered. He remembered the conversation they had about doing things one didn’t want to do to please the other, and another puzzle piece found its rightful place in his mind. It was something he perhaps should have realized long ago, as he imagined ordinary people do in their youth, but this was how his mind worked and now he understood, with perfect clarity, what it was all about. “Nothing is tedious if it makes you happy, my love.”

Hannibal paused, and rose on his elbows to gaze down at him. One hand found his chin, the thumb tracing the line. “What a wonder you are, *mylimasis*,” he murmured, and with renewed fervour, continued to grind down, stealing his breath with a kiss to keep them quiet. Will closed his eyes and held on, relishing the way it felt to be trapped between their bellies, the quiet grunts in his ear egging him on, his lips bitten to keep sounds at bay. Hannibal came, high on lust and devotion, and the emotions as much as the physicality of it all triggered Will’s orgasm, made him clench his fingers on Hannibal’s shoulders, nails digging in, the moan he couldn’t hold back muffled with another worshipful kiss.

Hannibal slid to the side a bit, half his body on Will’s and not yet bothered enough by the wetness spreading between them to get up. They collected their breath while Hannibal, his hand above Will’s heart, admired the ring on his finger and against Will’s skin. Will smiled at the ceiling; his fearsome cannibal husband-to-be was so disarmingly charming at times. He wondered how he failed to put that to his profile of the Ripper: Sounders of three, elevates prey to art, anatomical expertise, cuddler and a hopeless romantic.

“Somehow,” Will began, still whispering, “breaking dad’s rule feels more severe than breaking federal laws.”

Hannibal huffed out an amused breath. “And yet both have something in common.”

“What?”

“Arbitrariness,” Hannibal said, and Will felt his cheeky smile on his chest.

Will squeezed him on the shoulder, his smile wide, and decided that he would lend his mind to the colour stories and pattern resonance or whatnot for the wedding, if it fulfilled this man (*this man this man this man.*)

*

“I think we should finalize the guest list before we proceed,” Madeleine said during their breakfast next morning. She came armed with even more booklets, a spring in her steps, and she was scribbling on a hard cover notebook furiously. “Will, you said yesterday that we don’t have that many guests. You are both successful people in your fields, and I thought we were talking about- what, at least 250 people, maybe 300. I think we should make the list now so I can filter the locations accordingly.”

“I, uh,” Will began. He had talked about this with Hannibal, and what he had in mind was nowhere near her estimates.

“Madeleine,” Hannibal said, smooth as ever, dressed sharp in a three-piece sans the jacket at the moment, sleeves rolled up and looking nothing short of a dream overall. “Will and I prefer not to invite our colleagues. Not only do we prefer to leave behind that part of our lives behind, but we also like the flexibility it affords us in terms of setting the date and location.”

Madeleine looked as though Hannibal spoke in a language she did not know, but was tactful enough to nod and look back at her notes. “Alright,” she said, “so who do we have? Me and Beau, Abigail and…” she tried to save this one as well, but her pause was a moment too long before she said, “Brian, that is, my son. My- uhh, oth- younger! Younger son. He would want to bring his partner, I think, if she is available.” Abigail took more of Hannibal’s protein scramble onto her plate, looking nonchalant.

Beau cleared his throat. “Add Charlie and Meredith,” he said. Those were his friends from woodworking class, and Will heard about their adventures often enough to know they were good friends to his dad.

“And anyone else you might want to invite, of course,” he said, looking from Beau to Madeleine, and making a point to smile at her. “They are all welcome.”

She held in her breath for a while, and sure enough, released it on a question Will dreaded. “But won’t you and Hannibal invite anyone else? Friends, family?”

On the night Will asked Hannibal about his family, way before proposals and guest lists had even entered their minds, he had received a short but honest answer that *he had none left*. It had been such a profound statement that it haunted Will in moments he least expected, a gut feeling that told him that the story behind it was not only tragic, but also the reason he sometimes found Hannibal with this empty look about him; a silent pause during his composing sessions, a minute vagueness as he served tea, a strange stillness while watching Will with Abigail.

He did not approach the topic again, opting instead to let Hannibal decide whether or not he wanted to share, and if so, when.

“This here is the entirety of our family,” Hannibal said, the charming smile on his face enough to make Will appreciate the mastery of his person suit, “And I find I cannot complain,” he continued with a wink sent Abigail’s way.

Will saw the question on the tip of Madeleine’s tongue, and decided to put a stop to it immediately. “So I guess this means we would prefer a more, uh, intimate setting,” he said, pointing at the top of the stack where a very large venue was photographed, the bride and groom pretty much invisible amongst the masses. “Nothing like this, for sure.”

“I still think we should go over every option,” Hannibal said, “After all, we may not be a crowd, but it is the atmosphere more than the spatial dimensions that interests me.”

“Right, yes, the atmosphere,” Will dutifully nodded, wanting to remedy the crestfallen look that befell Madeleine. “Like, lighting. Good lighting is important.”

“Oh shut up, Will,” Abigail began to giggle. “You have no idea what you are talking about, do you?”

“Hey, I’ve never been married before!” Will exclaimed, playing into it. “I’m learning, though, aren’t I? I know now that I want no gold-leaf furniture in my vicinity. And certainly nowhere with a stage. My ears are still ringing from yesterday.”

“You think that would stop me?” Abigail asked, the mischievous light that Will missed so much back in her eyes now. “Just wait till you see the playlist I made for you.”

Now that was alarming. “What playlist?”

“Add Randy and Jeremy too,” Beau said offhandedly. “They can play the guitar and the flute.”

“Wait, no-”

“I was thinking we could hire an orchestra for the evening,” Hannibal suggested, and Will realized he was being made the butt of the joke when Madeleine turned her head to hide a smile.

“I think I’ll call to check up on my dogs,” Will said, rolling her eyes as he got up and placed his chair back in its place. “I find that I suddenly miss them very much. Again.”

Once he was out of their sight, he let himself smile too. The conversation had gone as well as it could, he thought. Before the whole debacle with Will’s arrest as the Chesapeake Ripper, Jack had viewed Abigail with suspicion for assisting her father with his murders, but lacked the justifiable evidence to restrict her in any way. After Will vomited out her ear, for which he still sometimes wanted to strangle Hannibal, her status had been missing, presumed dead. After he was cleared, it probably did not change. For her to be discovered alive and well, and attending Will’s wedding no less, would attract attention from Jack and the BAU that they

definitely did not want. That meant that they could not invite anyone from or with ties to the FBI, and Will was more than alright with it all.

Once he was in the backyard, he took out his phone, found the shelter's number and pressed dial. He thought perhaps Hannibal would have liked to invite their acquaintances at the FBI, Alana, or at least his socialite friends so he could show off to his heart's content. However, it had been him who rejected the idea in the first place. *I have so much more to protect than only myself, Will*, he had said, and that had been that. And while it did upset Will that Hannibal could not have it the way he might have wanted, he agreed that Abigail's continued wellbeing and her place with them were worth way more than all their friends and their aunts combined.

"Will?" came a familiar voice from the phone, and he did a double take, lost in thought as he was.

"Hi, uh. Lily," he said, and mentally checked the date. "I thought you didn't work on Wednesdays."

"We changed the schedule, now that the semester is over," Lily said, sounding withdrawn. It figured, really. This was causing pain for Abigail and Lily both. "Your dogs are doing great," she added when he didn't reply. "Dottie and Spike are getting along well with the others. Ripper is very playful, too. Chief is staying back from it all, but if I remember correctly, he was always a bit quiet."

"He's old," Will said, distantly aware he was being curt with her. He decided to change that. "Thank you for letting me know they are alright, Lily. How are you?"

"I've doubled my shifts here, and I continue attending the rowing practices. I also got a small part in a local theatre production. The rehearsals start in the next month, so…" She drifted off, and another awkward silence commenced.

"But are you okay?" Will asked, concern for her rearing its head. He knew, first hand, what it did to find out that the person you love was actively lying to you about who they were. It did things to him, and it would do things to her too. He wondered if one day he could talk to Lily about it all without his own lies and deception, but pushed the thought aside for the time being.

"I… I want everything to go back to the way they were before," she mumbled into the phone. Will squeezed his eyes shut at the onslaught of emotions a mere phone conversation conveyed, a lump forming in his throat. "I want to say it was just this once, but I'm afraid she'll be hiding more from me and I…"

Will felt like the guy who left his home and went to stay with his dad, *Papa Beau's Home for the Broken Hearted* indeed, and he wanted so badly to shake this feeling of resentment and sorrow but he needed to hold on for now.

"Why aren't you with your mother?" He asked. Her mother lived in the States, and Lily was still in Paris even though school was over now. "A change in scenery may help put things in perspective."

“Maybe,” Lily said, sounding doubtful. “I just don’t want her to see me like this.”

That was a blatant lie, and it was at that moment that Will decided their non-interference policy was shit.

“Is that it? Or maybe,” he said, lifting his eyes to the clear blue skies. “Maybe you don’t want to be reminded that you shot someone, your father, to protect yourself and your mother?”

“I- I-” She stammered, but Will pressed on.

“No, that’s not it, is it? It is how much you liked it that you don’t want to remember,” Will stated it as the fact that it was, finally putting his empathy to good use. “Did it feel good to do bad things to bad people? I know I thought so, when I shot Abigail’s father to save her. He was holding a knife to her throat. I emptied an entire charger into him, but he still managed to slit her throat open. I could not help her, she was losing so much blood, couldn’t breathe. Hannibal had to intervene. He pressed his naked hands to her neck to control the bleeding.”

The line was silent except for the distant barks of the dogs at the shelter, and Will knew she was listening without breathing. “That was what she had to survive. Or, rather, what *I witnessed* of what she had to survive. It is ugly and it is horrible, and it leaves a mark. Abigail can never be all sunshine and rainbows, Lily, just as you can’t.” Will inhaled deeply, the sweet scent of summer blooms filling his lungs, urging him on. “A word of advice,” he said, letting compassion colour his voice. “Don’t delight in wickedness and then berate yourself for it. Don’t do it to Abigail either. You loved her with her darkness, don’t use this as an excuse to justify your righteousness, at the expense of her love for you, and your love for her. Because that, Lily. *That* would be the ugliest thing in the world.”

“I have to go,” Lily said, and she didn’t wait for a reply to hang up. Will lowered his phone, and looked at the dining table Beau cut and carved himself, and the chairs that carried the touches of Abigail and Lily as well. It was trite symbolism, but it fit.

“How are the dogs?” Abigail asked when he went back to the kitchen. The table had been cleared of breakfast and covered, once more, with brochures. She and Madeleine were bent over them, while Beau flipped a booklet and Hannibal washed the dishes.

Will gave Abigail a wide smile. “They will be just fine,” he said, and ignored Hannibal’s look over his shoulder. “And turn on your phone, will you? I want to be able to reach you if we end up separated here.”

Abigail hesitated but nodded at the end. Will gave her the second wink she received that morning, and went to help Hannibal with the clean-up.

*

“You seem happy,” Hannibal said as they made their way from their rental car to the tailor, where Hannibal had arranged for a meeting. *Not just any tailor*, Hannibal had been quick to reassure him as if Will needed reassuring, *a very good tailor; one of the best in the business*. Will refrained from asking how a man who spent his last two decades in Baltimore and Paris

knew of New Orleans tailoring market. He simply assumed that he had been right in his assumptions that Hannibal was an omnipresent being, after all.

“I feel good,” Will agreed. With a subtle glance towards Abigail, walking on his other side. “I can’t wait to choose your wedding suit,” he said with a smirk.

“Had I known your penchant for it, darling of mine, I would have asked you to accompany me to the tailor long ago,” Hannibal said, a twinkle in his eyes.

“Don’t speak too soon,” Abigail chimed in, “Let’s first make sure he won’t insist on an all flannel design.”

“Hey!” Will sent a mock glare her way. “You are ruining my evil masterplan.”

“See?” Abigail said to Hannibal, and with a quickened pace, reached for the door before them and held it open for them like a concierge. Will had to admit that a concierge would not look out of place in the store, with its high ceilings and, of course, gold-lined, ceiling-high cabinets of fabric. He gave the ladder a fond look, remembering how he liked to go lean on the one in Hannibal’s office in Baltimore while they had their *conversations*.

A smartly dressed woman in her mid-thirties approached them, her chunky high heels clicking on the marble floor. Will thought that if her pencil skirt and draped blouse was the work of this shop, then they were in good hands. “Hello, welcome to Pewter and Co. Tailoring. My name is Judith, and I will assist you today. You must be Doctor Lecter and Mr. Graham?”

Will waited for Hannibal to talk, but found the man unresponsive. He turned his head to see, and was surprised to find him expressionless. His face was a blank canvas that Will only got to see when Hannibal had no idea how to respond, how to present himself to the world. Quickly, Will took a step forward, introduced himself and the others, and told her why they were there. She gave them a kind smile, and directed them to a spacious waiting room in the back, assured them Mr. Pewter himself would join them shortly, and excused herself to get them a menu, of all things.

Abigail, keen as she was, sidled close to Will.

“What’s going on with him?” She asked very quietly. Will shook his head. He had no idea. Did he know the woman? She didn’t appear to know him at all. He took a few steps forward.

“Hannibal?” He asked, and though the man turned his body towards him, his eyes remained distant. Very distant. Years, no, *decades* ago. There was a breeze in the room, so cold it made Will shiver in under all the layers he was used to wearing. “Hannibal,” he tried again, “would you like to leave?”

In a blink and you’ll miss it manner, Hannibal was back to his usual self. “We’ve only just arrived,” he said, and without meeting Will’s eyes, went to take a seat in one of the tufted leather armchairs. He looked impeccable, posture straight, one leg over the other and hands entwined on his lap. This was his psychiatrist pose, and Will was not getting a good vibe

from whatever it was that was going on right now. Abigail followed and took a seat as well. Will was the last to do so.

Judith came back with the menus as promised, and Hannibal asked for a glass of Pinot Grigio as if he had not just *fucking glitched*. Abigail and Will asked for the same, but Will also asked if she could do something about the breeze.

“The breeze, sir?” She asked, making eye contact and smiling at him kindly. She had high cheekbones, eyes the colour of honey, her smile lines pronounced. She looked familiar.

“It’s very cold in here,” Will replied, suppressing a shiver. No one else looked cold. The windows were open but the curtains remained still. “Maybe I caught something, never mind. Thank you,” he said, and burrowed into the armchair. When they were once again left alone in the waiting room, he caught Hannibal’s eye. The look he was given sent another shiver down Will’s spine with how much it resembled the Hannibal he knew, when Will was feverish with sickness and Hannibal wound him up to watch him go. The disinterested, weighing, calculative gaze was wrong, so wrong, on the man Will got to know after- after everything. The woman was so familiar, the room so cold, Abigail so sickly white and small, he was so fucking hungry and was he having an episode?

He was jolted out of his thoughts when Judith offered him his drink. Will nodded in thanks, drank it all in two gulps, so thirsty, so uncharacteristically greedy. And perhaps it was that that connected the dots for him. He looked back at Hannibal, and from the reptilian tilt of his head, he knew the leap he made was noticed.

“I need some air,” Will said, getting up. “Call me if you need me.”

Hannibal was on his feet and before him in a flash. He was so fast when he wanted to be, so quiet, so deadly. He had to be. To kill everyone who had the *audacity* to touch, to *take*-

“Will,” Hannibal murmured, his hands on Will’s arms restricting his departure but not the shivers that wrecked his body. “It’s alright,” he said. This was Doctor Hannibal Lecter, and not the guy who called him *mylimasis* and had trouble falling asleep without holding him. He kept his focus on Will while addressing Abigail. “Please let them know we will be right back.” With that, Will was led out of the waiting room and out of the shop by an arm around his shoulders, Hannibal’s weight and warmth a weak reassurance for Will.

In the backseat of the car, they sat apart, and it wasn’t until Will stopped shivering that either talked.

“What was her name?” He asked, croaked more like, his throat parched.

“Whose name?” Hannibal casually picked a piece of lint from his trousers.

“Oh no, no no no,” Will said, a deep frown marring his features. “You don’t get to celebrate my empathy and shut me off when it turns on you.”

“Why *do* you turn it on me, Will?” Hannibal asked, as he used to ask *‘How does that make you* feel*, Will?’*

“I didn’t plan any of this!” Will exclaimed, gesturing vaguely in the direction of the shop. “You know I can’t turn it off, you know how it feels-”

“Let’s not do this here,” Hannibal interrupted. Each twitch in his facial muscles, the exact intonation of his voice, his entire body language; all of it was arranged specifically to make Will question his actions. He wanted Will to feel hysterical, feel ashamed for causing a scene, feel guilty for looking at Hannibal and seeing him. He wanted Will to doubt himself, second-guess his revelation, forget this ever happened. A fluke, a mishap of Will’s unfortunately fucked up head.

This was manipulation he had hoped was far, far behind them.

“Think very carefully about what you are doing, Hannibal,” he said. The last time Hannibal looked at him like this, he ended up institutionalized. Hannibal would not have an easy time coming back from it again. “Please don’t shut me off.” *‘Please don’t lie to me.’*

“If that is what you wish, Will,” Hannibal began. *‘I know who I am.’ ‘No. All sense of who you are has been distorted by your illness*,’ Will heard. “Why insist on this blatant disregard for boundaries? Must you venture where you are not invited?”

What followed was stillness; in Will’s heart, within his veins, inside the confines of his mind. “I see,” he said, and calmly, oh so very calmly, exited the car, shutting the door behind himself gently. He knew more than he could hear that Hannibal called after him, but he kept walking. He went back into the store, took Abigail by the hand, and ignoring Hannibal’s looming presence by the door, he kept walking. He turned left here, right there, followed the crowd and he just. Kept. Walking.

So this was the catch, he thought, the downtown a blur around him as he put one foot in front of the other, dragging Abigail along into an illusive safety. This was the red line he should not have crossed. The wall he should not have climbed over.

In the end, what he thought was a mountain was a card house, crumbling with a single winter breeze.

“Will!” he was stopped by the hand he was squeezing, hard. He turned to Abigail, and pulled her into an embrace in the middle of the busy sidewalk. He wanted so badly to feel her alive and whole, not having her ears cut off or her blood being drawn to be splashed in her parents’ kitchen. She was not being whisked away to be hidden in a sea-side safe house until it was strategically beneficial for her to come out either.

“God, Abigail,” he said, breathing in the scent of her shampoo and conditioner. “I’m…” He didn’t know what he was. “You…” What did she want? Did she want to go back to Hannibal? Was it safe? “Stay with me,” he said at last.

“Let’s find somewhere to sit, huh?” She wriggled her way out of his embrace. “Let’s drink something, and you tell me what the *fuck* is going on.” Without further ado, she dragged him into the cafe they were standing in front of, and pushed him, albeit gently, to sit at the bar. She ordered them both Southern Comfort, a pretty self-explanatory attempt to get him to calm down, and took the stool next to him.

Contrary to her initial demand, though, she let him soak the bourbon and try to make sense of things by himself.

The problem was that he couldn't.

His phone rang just as he signalled for a refill. It was Hannibal.

"Maybe you should pick it up," Abigail said. She knew first-hand how valuable a call from a significant other was. He, however, turned the phone off entirely and put it back in his pocket.

"I… noticed something." He knew she was curious, but he also knew he could not tell her everything. "About him. He… did not like it."

"Was it about the woman there?" Abigail watched with wide eyes as he knocked down the refill and lifted a hand for more. "I noticed he was weird, when he saw her."

"Yeah, it was about her," Will said. The liquid was beginning to warm his limbs for the first time since the store.

"That bastard!" Abigail never actually, seriously swore. Hers were playful jabs, never this indignant, angry cursing. Will looked at her with wide eyes. "I never, not in a million years, would have even *imagined* he could even notice anyone other than you. I can't believe him!" Her cheeks were reddening, her blue eyes filled with ire. She took a gulp from her own glass and grimaced at the taste.

"You think he liked her?" He was in such a peculiar state of mind that he wanted to memorize Abigail in her misguided and yet entirely sweet way to care for him and give him her support.

"Wait, what? Isn't that what happened?" She asked. Her phone began to ring. She took it out and glanced at the screen, her eyes almost bulging. She stumbled out of her stool and stood, and Will snatched at her wrist.

"Don't go with him," he said. Deep down he knew Hannibal would not harm her unless he was done with all of them and determined for a fresh start without any unfinished business, but he did not believe himself at the moment.

"It's Lily," Abigail whispered. That was when he noticed the ringtone, different from the others, set up by her to alert her when Lily called. *-just too good to be true. Can't take my eyes off of y-* "I need to-"

"There's a backyard, over there," Will found, and nodded towards the back. "Do not leave, Abigail."

She nodded and fled, leaving Will by himself. He inclined his head graciously when the bartender renewed his glass.

*

“She wants to get back together.”

During her two-hour phone call, Will had taken off his jacket and unbuttoned his shirt at the top. The cafe part was still full, the lively chatter in the background creating a lull that felt cozy with the hundreds of mismatched lights that lined the walls. Alcohol was, of course, also doing its job. Will felt pleasantly numb, his attention span shortened to that of a newborn pup, and he felt so happy for Abigail. He swayed a bit as he turned to her, and gave her stunned face a smile.

“And what did you say?” he asked still, dutiful.

“I said that we never broke up,” Abigail replied in monotone, mirroring Will and slouching on the stool, elbows on the bar before them. “That we never could,” she added. Will laughed and took her under his arm, closing his eyes when she rested her head on his shoulder.

“What did I tell you?” Will said, pronouncing each word carefully so that his slurring was not so obvious. “You didn’t blame her for murder and get her to be poked and prodded by assholes in an asylum. You had this in the bag!”

Abigail, to her credit, tried to hold back her laughter for a few seconds, but failed spectacularly. Will watched her slam her fist at the bar, and hold her side when the laughter became painful. The release of weeks’ worth of longing and battling with rejection, her insecurities like flies swarming about her, was a spectacular affair. After she calmed down enough to wipe the tears from her eyes and ask for her own refill, she nudged him with her shoulder.

“She also said she talked to you. And Hannibal.” Upon hearing the name, Will’s smile dimmed a bit, but she carried on. “You guys told her to get her shit together and get over herself, apparently.”

“I said no such thing,” Will murmured, “And he was probably less vulgar than that. Quoted Beccaria or something. Sounded like he had a stick-” he hiccoughed, “up his butt. Or something.”

“Probably,” Abigail agreed because, honestly, the man did love his allegories and metaphors so. “He’s such a snob.” Will raised his glass to hers, and they clinked them. “Would he really cheat on you, though?”

“What?” Will could not make sense of the question until he thought back to their conversation. “Oh no, no. He wouldn’t. I know that. It’s not that.”

“What is it then?”

“He’s, uh, overprotective. Of his family. His first family, I mean. The biological one.” All too aware he was babbling, he shook his head to clear it. “He doesn’t want me to… Know. About what happened to them.”

Abigail listened carefully and with a bird-like tilt of her head, tried to meet his eyes. “And you found out about that in a tailor shop?”

“You would not want to have what I have,” he said, tapping a finger against his temple. “He shut me off. Reverted back. To how he was. Before.” With a sigh, Will rested his chin on his folded arms upon the counter. “And I snapped, I suppose.”

“On an unrelated note,” Abigail said, narrowing her eyes a bit. “Why didn’t you tell me you talked to Lily?”

“I wanted her to call you herself,” Will replied honestly, “Didn’t want to get your hopes up.”

“Exactly,” she said, and with the grin of the cat that ate the canary, she slid off her stool with her drink in her hand and made her way back to the backyard, leaving Will to look at her retreating back in confusion.

“Is this seat taken?” came the heavily accented, snobbish, stuck-up, manipulative, *evil* sound from somewhere above Will, and he understood what Abigail meant. He did not look up though.

“Yes, by the ghosts of your past,” he said with a sneer. “Take them with you on your way out, why don’t ya. They’re chatty.”

Hannibal sat down and turned his back to the other patrons at the bar in favour of facing Will. He watched as Will raised his glass to his mouth and realized it was empty. “How much have you drank, Will?”

“Not enough,” Will murmured as he lifted an unsteady hand to get the bartender’s attention. He was sobering up, and quickly. “Nowhere near enough.”

“Do you think you will remember any of this tomorrow?” Came the question, words spoken lowly and uttered close to his ear to be heard over the thickening evening crowd. Will leaned away, and avoided bumping into the woman sitting next to him by grasping the bar top with one hand and pulling himself back.

“Don’t patronize me. I don’t forget, Doctor Lecter.” Will looked up at the high ceilings, the brick walls, and the ragtag collection of ornamental lanterns hanging from the ceiling. At dusk, this place looked enchanting. “Or, hell, maybe I do. If I remembered, it wouldn’t hurt this bad when you play me so.”

A soft melody began to play, the acoustic guitar heard so faintly with all these people talking and laughing, adding to the homely atmosphere. Any other time, Will might have enjoyed it. Right now, trying to avoid Hannibal’s eyes and squirming under the scrutiny, he could not.

“You entered the foyer of my mind and stumbled down the hall of my beginnings,” Hannibal finally said, eyeing Will’s glass as it was filled. He ignored Will’s inelegant snort. “I was confident that only I could wander there. And you must understand, Will, that even I do not dare to do so most of the time.”

Will took the glass in his hands again, but instead of bringing it to his mouth, he let himself observe how the amber light penetrated the amber liquid and reflected off of his amber ring.

He felt an alternative version of himself, frozen still in resin, in this moment, forever anguished and bitter.

“I panicked,” Hannibal confessed, and Will, not expecting the statement at all, finally turn to him. He looked pretty much the same as he had a few hours ago, but his face was alive. He looked gaunt, if such a thing was even possible under this much warm light, a grave air about him, around the eyes and the mouth, in the lines of his forehead. He was not hiding behind a mask of neutrality, he was not trying to gaslight his way out of Will’s life. This was the kind of earnestness Will knew was not feigned. “I know you cannot control it, but I was not prepared. I panicked, and I reacted impulsively. Poorly. I apologize, Will.”

Blinking with difficulty due to his heavy eyelids, Will traced the tiny honey-coloured spots hidden in the maroon Hannibal’s eyes. “Do you think you’ll do it again?”

It was an important question, and Hannibal treated it as such. He tipped his head forward a bit as he considered. “After we talk about what happened to Mischa,” he said, a new emotion colouring the unfamiliar name, “no, I don’t think there’s anything I would react to this strongly.”

“Will you push me off again?” Will pressed. This was important, he knew, because it touched with unabashed, greedy hands at the particular insecurities of their relationship; Will’s fear of being influenced and abandoned, Hannibal’s regret over playing him, both their dread of anything disrupting the efforts they made to make a place for themselves in this world and within each other’s hearts. They pledged the rest of their lives to each other, but it would mean nothing if they didn’t feel comfortable enough with each other to stay, vulnerable yet trusting, even when it hurt to do so.

“Remember, my love, I promised to never let you go. Even if you ran.” Hannibal raised a tentative hand to caress Will’s cheek, and looked into Will’s eyes solemnly. “I have never let anyone in to the degree that you have come, Will. You are not only in my veins anymore; you have seeped into the capillaries of my mind.” Hannibal ran his thumb across the sensitive skin under Will’s eye, his touch so tender. “You are so deep within my psyche that it feels like you have always been with me. And there’s nowhere else I’d rather you be. But if I ever falter again,” Hannibal leaned in until their foreheads almost touched. “Do not let me ruin this, Will.”

“I won’t let you fuck up,” Will told it like it was. Finally, Hannibal’s trademark smile (a brightening of his eyes accompanied with a slight upward curl of his lips) made itself seen. “But you don’t fuck up, too. Just in case.”

“I shall not dare,” Hannibal promised.

“And there will be a reckoning for this,” Will said, finally letting himself lean into the touch against his cheek, his eyes falling shut on their own accord. “You are not getting off so easily. Just you wait, I’ll think of something.”

“And I will bear whatever you dish out gladly, my darling Will,” he said, finally letting their foreheads meet as they both savoured the significance of the moment.

That was, until the bartender slammed two glasses on the countertop for them. In synch, they turned to regard him. The guy -Oliver, Will knew due to how long he'd been sitting there watching him work- grinned at them and gestured towards the glasses. "On the house," he said simply, the man of few words that he proved himself to be over the course of the last few hours, and went to serve drinks to a giggly group of friends.

"Would you like to go home, Will?" Hannibal asked, eyeing the curvy glass of colourful liquid with suspicion.

"Right after I finish this," Will said, and reached for his tequila sunrise with a vindictive glee. "Hair of the dog, you know?"

"Can't say I do. And I will be driving us back," Hannibal said. Will reached to pull his glass closer to himself at that. He laughed at the exasperation Hannibal exuded but, wisely, kept unmentioned. In the corner of his eye, he saw Abigail coming downstairs -when did she go up and why?- and waved at her to come join them. She could have the other glass. Will was feeling particularly generous right now.

*

"My my, now I've seen everything!" Beau exclaimed when he opened the door to them. He was in a set of lightweight pyjama set with buttons, an item that proclaimed it was a gift from Madeleine for sure, and it triggered a giggling fit in Will. Hannibal tightened his grip around his waist to hold him up when he wavered forward.

"Good evening, Beau. Or shall I say, good night?" He led Will into the living room, intent on setting him gently in one of the armchairs, but Will threw himself down on the couch, messing up the bed Beau must have prepared for Abigail. Abigail, while much soberer than Will, let herself fall next to him with just as much force, making the old couch creak in complaint. Hannibal took a look at their reclined forms, and decided they'd be fine for a few minutes alone. "May I have a word?" He asked Beau.

"Sure, might as well get these two hydrated while we're at it," Beau said, looking over his shoulder at his son and granddaughter on his way to the kitchen. "Care to tell me what this is all about?" He asked, abandoning the quest for water immediately upon entering the room and taking a seat. Hannibal did so as well.

"Start with why my son turned off his phone, why Abigail's line was busy, and why you weren't with them." Beau leaned back in his chair and folded his arms on his chest.

"Let us start from the end," Hannibal said. Bringing his hands together on the table between them and leaning on his elbows. "Will and I had a… Disagreement, in the tailor shop," he began, all too conscious of the fact that, once again, in this kitchen, with Beau, he was taking extreme care when choosing his words. "He took Abigail and they departed. I had to explain that we had to leave to the staff, but in that short period of time, they disappeared. I called Will, but he turned off his phone. I called Abigail, and she was talking to Lily." At that, Beau's stern look dissipated momentarily. "I believe they have made up," Hannibal further explained, hoping that the good news would alleviate the glare that was sent his way.

“Good for ‘em,” Beau huffed, “It was a silly thing anyway. Was your disagreement silly as well? Was his design not to your liking?”

“It was not that.” Hannibal looked down at his hands. “I behaved poorly,” he said, “and I should have made sure you were notified earlier about their wellbeing.”

“Damn right,” Beau said. “I remember what I told Will after you appeared in my front yard to grovel,” Hannibal wisely kept his mouth shut at the word choice. “I told him you were dangerous. That if he did something you didn’t want done, you might turn on him.” He let the silence tell Hannibal what that entailed in his mind. “He assured me that you knew better than that. Was he wrong?”

“In this instance, he was,” Hannibal replied, once again choosing honesty with Beau.

“How many more instances, do you think, before I have to bury him?”

Hannibal looked up at that, met the full brunt of Beau’s glare, and shook his head. “Never. I-”

“Listen here, *Doctor*,” Beau curtly interrupted, mirroring his pose, looking stronger and much more threatening than ever. “You think you are on top of the world, don’t you? The food chain, even,” he said with a snort at Hannibal’s blank expression. “I ain’t blind or deaf, you know? I know how to read between the lines. I know how to read the news as well. I know a lot of things.” An ominous silence lasted for a few beats. “And do I look scared?”

When he realized this was not a rhetorical question, Hannibal answered. “No.” He did not, at all, look intimidated.

“No,” Beau repeated, but did not elaborate. Hannibal thought the lack of exposure was a fine way to go about it, for his mind was filled instantaneously with scenarios that ended up with him separated from Will and Abigail. None were acceptable, and yet he was coming up with more by the second. “You do things *for* the family, not *to* them. Get that into your head right now. Don’t make my son take off with Abby to keep her intact. He comes to me all sad and drunk one more time, and it’ll be my face in the FBI’s most wanted list.”

The sound of giggling reached them, Abigail’s higher than Will’s, and it helped erase the menacing look about Beau. “Now, he appears to have forgiven you,” he said. “Hope you are smart enough to make sure he doesn’t have to again.” With that, he got up, knees cracking but posture straight, and poured three glasses of water. He placed one in front of Hannibal, who was immobile where he was sitting, looking at Beau’s empty chair.

“Good night, Hannibal,” he said lightly, and exited the kitchen with the other glasses. Hannibal waited until he heard the old man go up the stairs before going into the living room.

“Your dad is scary,” he stated, and it set of another bout of giggles from the couch. Will was on his back while Abigail was laying on her front and pushing her face under the pillow. Hannibal sighed, long-suffering, and stood over them until they both drank their water.

“Come on,” he said to Will, extending him a hand. “Let’s get you to bed.”

Will grumbled but took the hand, making Hannibal pull his entire weight to get him on his feet. “Night, Abigail.”

“You too,” she said, and Hannibal, using his unoccupied hand, turned off the light to the living room on their way out. He led Will into the bathroom, and waited outside until he got out before taking them to their room.

“What’d dad tell you?” Will asked, working on his button-up while Hannibal took off his shoes and socks.

“Long version or short?” Hannibal said, grabbing Will’s hands and pressing a kiss to each before putting them aside and working on the buttons himself.

“Short,” Will replied, unzipping his pants.

Not bothering to fold Will’s discarded shirt, Hannibal draped it over the back of the chair by the dresser. “He told me to get my shit together, or else.”

“Hear hear!” Will lifted his hips to push his pants down, and let Hannibal pull it off of him. With a surprisingly good impression of Hannibal’s accented speech considering his inebriated state, he said, “‘*If that is what you wish, must you venture where you are not invited, Will?*’ God, you are such an asshole sometimes.”

Hannibal parted the quilt and watched as a grumbling Will burrowed under until only his curls were visible under the lights from the street. When Hannibal was not addressed again, he quickly left for the bathroom himself and found Will in the same position when he returned. After he shed his own suit, leaving it on the same chair, he got into the bed as well, but stayed on his side and let himself watch what he could see of Will for a while.

There were very few things he regretted doing in his life, and somehow, most of them were about Will Graham. He remembered what he told Will, about having people to care for, and how it opened him to their influence. He should have listened to himself on that as well. It was only natural that Will, a man so keen that he figured out Hannibal was the Ripper while half his head was on fire, would eventually find a way to Mischa. He did not know how much of it Will saw, but judging from how the day progressed, he assumed it was a substantial amount.

His endeavours to keep Will away from the horrors of his past had, perhaps, been destined to fail from the very beginning.

To his surprise, he must have drifted off at some point, because he was jolted awake by Will’s yell, cut short by the man himself as he sat up and turned on the bedside lamp, breathless and shivering.

“Will?” Hannibal reached for him, instantly awake.

Will rubbed his face vigorously with shaking hands. “How do you live with this,” he said. It did not sound like a question. He glanced at Hannibal over his shoulder, and did not hesitate

to move when Hannibal opened his arms to him, letting him envelop him in a tight, warm embrace.

“Oh, my darling boy,” Hannibal sighed, cradling the back of Will’s head against his chest, and trying to soothe the tremors by running a broad hand across his back. “What do you see?”

“Cold. Hunger.” Will moved to straddle Hannibal, wrapping himself around the sitting man to the best of his ability. “No parents. You were alone, so young. She was younger.” Another shudder. Hannibal reached to gather the quilt around Will. “Tell me,” he whispered. Hannibal was steeling himself to do just that, but Will added, “Tell me you killed them all.”

“I did,” Hannibal said, marvelling at the leaps this brilliant boy could make, from so little evidence and with what he knew of Hannibal himself. “I killed them, *mano meilė.*”

“Everyone?” Will drew himself back a bit to look into Hannibal’s eyes.

“One, I kept alive,” Hannibal admitted. “He resides in my old home, a prisoner of my aunt’s maid, Chiyoh.”

“You wouldn’t let him live if he was responsible,” Will said, brows furrowed.

“They were all responsible, Will. Human traffickers, plunderers. One does not need to yield the axe,” he swallowed, hard, “to be very, *very bad* men.”

“They took her from me,” Will started. He looked so lost. Hannibal ran a hand through Will’s hair, and found him by his side in front of a camp fire with a bowl pushed into his little, frostbitten hands. “And they brought me soup,” Hannibal finished.

In his mind’s eye, Will, a mere child himself, reached for his hand. It was so cold that Hannibal didn’t feel it, couldn’t bend his fingers, but it was enough for something to break. In the bed, he was turned and laid on Will, who kept murmuring nonsense into his ear, stroked his hair, any part of him he could reach, their limbs entwined.

It was when he noticed Will’s skin was wet against his cheek that Hannibal realized he had been crying. “I didn’t want you there,” he forced himself to say anyway.

“I’m here,” Will replied, similarly choked. “And you’ll take me to your home. And we will free Chiyoh of her burden. Together.”

“Together,” Hannibal echoed, feeling Will, both young and old, shelter him against the cold.

*

“Maddie?”

“Yes, Abby, dear?”

“I found the place. Here, check it out.”

“Oh, I don’t know. Seems kind of… Ran down, don’t you think?”

“Nope. This is it, this is the place. We were there just yesterday, it’s beautiful. And look, they rent for organizations too. See here? That’s a wedding right there.”

“Are you sure?”

“They are both sentimental assholes, they’re gonna love it. Just book it at their earliest convenience, and trust me.”

“Without asking them? What if-”

“Do it, Maddie.”

“But what about the food, the music? The flowers, the invitations, the-”

“Pfft, they don’t care about that. They only care about each other, so the adventure will be yours and mine.”

“...Oh alright, I’ll call them.”

“Great!”

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Something felt different to Will, when he woke up. The hangover, normal. The tiredness from interrupted sleep and nightmare, totally normal. The emotional strain of empathizing with a young, traumatized Hannibal, well, that was also normal.

Deep in his core, however, something he felt was normal, something he grew up to think would always be a bit crooked with ragged edges, had settled.

It was also mid-morning and Hannibal was still in the bed. More accurately, he was staring at Will's sleepy mug from where his chin was perched on Will's chest, with a completely besotted look.

"Hi," Will said, and lines around Hannibal's eyes and lips deepened. Will could even see the tips of his fangs in that smile.

"Hello, Will."

"Why are you not up?" Will murmured, the alarm clock by the bed revealing it to be 10:47 am.

"Charming," Hannibal huffed out a laugh. His hand played with what little chest hair Will had as he spoke. "I thought we could afford to have a bit of a lay in, after the day we had."

Will placed his hand on his, trapping it over his heart. "If only I knew that was what it took to keep you in bed past the sunrise…" he trailed off, sharing a grin with Hannibal.

Whatever it was that had changed, it was reciprocal and it felt damn good, if he were perfectly honest.

They zeroed in on the sound of someone come up the stairs, very careful not to be heard, and tiptoe down the corridor to the bathroom. Whoever it was closed the door silently as well. Will and Hannibal shared a look.

"Well, I guess they thought we should sleep in, too." With a yawn, Will stretched his body like a cat, his hands going up to push against the headboard. He could feel Hannibal's mind going to places without looking, the hand on his chest pressing him down just so.

"It's not as though you have any urgent matters to attend to, do you, Will?"

"Smooth," Will replied with a chuckle. "But as a matter of fact, I do. I need to attend to my morning breath and bladder."

"And then?"

“And then I need to uphold dad’s rule, because, you know, you can’t be trusted with it. And everyone is awake.”

Hannibal, the dramatic person that he was, shook his head slowly and sighed. “Let me find you some ibuprofen.”

“You’re a godsend,” Will said, and they got up to find something fresh to put on so they could face the day.

The kitchen revealed Madeleine and Beau with their heads bent towards each other, whispering. They separated when Will entered, making him feel as though he disrupted something private.

“Will, good… Afternoon,” Madeleine greeted him with a kind smile. “I heard you had a wild night.”

“I did, yes,” Will scratched at his hair self-consciously. “Um, where’s Abigail?”

“Where, indeed,” Beau chuckled. “I’ll let you take a peak, but promise not to disturb them- Wow, deja vu.” He nodded towards the backyard. Will approached it, but the door was closed. Stealthily, with one finger, he parted the curtain on the door.

Lily.

More to the point, Lily and Abigail, on either side of the farthest corner of Beau’s table, sitting on mismatched, hand-carved chairs. They were bent towards each other, their hands intertwined between them, leaving no plausible way to wipe the tears on their faces. Lily’s hair was a mess, her baggy t-shirt hanging off her shoulders. This was the first time he saw her not entirely put together, adding a fragile air to their reunion. By the looks of it, she must have departed right after she talked to Abigail, and taken what was doubtlessly a very costly cross-continental flight to see her. It was all very touching.

So of course, once he made sure that the flash was off, he took a picture. Of course.

He never claimed he was not petty.

“We shall hang it over the fireplace,” Hannibal whispered conspiratorially from right behind him. Will congratulated himself for not jumping where he stood.

“Read my mind,” he said, and with one last look at the girls, turned to Hannibal. Another three-piece, the same gelled hair, but an altogether softer man stood before him. “I love you,” Will said, serious as can be, not feeling like an utter softie (*damnit Abigail*) for declaring it out of the blue.

“Now who’s reading whose mind?” Hannibal kissed him on the lips once. And then again, and then one more time.

“Must be something in the air,” Hannibal murmured when they separated, one hand up to part the curtain behind him. Will did not want to know what exactly he was looking at from above

his shoulder, so he pushed Hannibal towards the kitchen. “I’m hungry and hangover. Cook for me.”

“Gladly, *mylimasis*.”

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They left the house quietly, leaving a note for them on the kitchen table so Abigail and Lily would not worry. Will was entirely prepared for a day of looking at prospective wedding locations, but was surprised when Beau drove to the airport.

“Are we expecting someone else?” Hannibal asked from his place in the backseat next to Will.

“Oh, yes,” Madeleine said, aiming for nonchalance but failing miserably. “Brian, he, uh… Took a few days off work- he works in advertisement- and he wanted to come see me. Meet you all. I think we can take a day off from the- the planning, ourselves.”

Will looked at the backs of his parents’ heads, and wondered how he ended up being the one to seek eye contact. “Huh,” he said. Hannibal gave him a smirk, which he returned. He was way past the point of being hurt that Madeleine had another son who she mothered his entire life. He’d had time to make peace with the fact since she barged into their lives. And yet, if she felt this nervous about it, well. He would just let her.

Hannibal reached to squeeze his hand, letting him know exactly how much he enjoyed Will’s cruel streak. Will squeezed right back.

In the parking garage, they decided that Beau and Madeleine would welcome Brian. During this conversation, Beau kept wiping his palms on the jumper he wore over his shirt, fidgeting. “You’re a catch, dad,” Will whispered to him right as they were about to depart. “Never forget that.”

“Zip it, boy,” Beau spat, and quickened his pace to reach Madeleine who was already heading towards the elevators. Will took his place next to Hannibal, leaning against the hood of the car as they waited.

“Madeleine’s *younger* son was supposed to come for the wedding,” Hannibal commented as if he was talking about the weather. “Was he not?

“He was.”

“And she is way too invested in the planning to take a break, don’t you think?”

“I do,” Will said, shaking his head. “They’re going to surprise us with our own wedding. Can you believe it?”

“I find myself strangely complacent with the idea.”

Will raised one brow. “You? Mister ‘I can’t display him without the right shade of begonias, Will’? You are alright with this?”

Hannibal conceded the point with a tilt of his head. “In my defence, the colour was vital for the message we were trying to convey at the time.” He grinned at Will’s exaggerated eye-roll. This had happened early in their *unique* excursions, and Will had been excitable to the point that aborting the mission had been quite disappointing for him. “Nevertheless, when I think about it, nothing about you or our relationship has been what I could objectively call predictable or controllable. Our meeting, our reunion, our proposals, and now our wedding. Why resist the fate?”

“I should have figured you’d find the pattern poetic.” Will shifted closer to him. He had tried to be subtle but was noticed and met halfway, their thighs toughing from hip to knee. “And I really suck at this all planning thing anyway…”

“My only regret would be not having a suit made for you.”

“We don’t know when they are planning to have it,” Will said. He would have preferred for Hannibal to have this, at the very least. “Perhaps we could go back to the…”

“*Brian* is said to be over for a few days, which is not enough time to have a bespoke suit finished, especially not to our satisfaction.” Hannibal nudged him at the shoulder. “We can go shopping for one, though.”

“What about you?” Will asked. He could not imagine Hannibal wearing a suit whose material he did not personally trace back to the animal from which it was spun or whatever he usually did.

“I have your favourite with me,” Hannibal said, “And my objective is to look good only for you.”

“That’s a blatant lie, and you always look good,” Will murmured, and stopped himself from trying to hide the blush that felt warm on his cheeks.

“So do you, my love,” Hannibal murmured, his eyes narrow with a smile. “I did fall in love with you when you wore flannel and dog hair, after all.” He ignored Will’s slap to his thigh. “However, for the occasion, let us go for something a bit more formal.”

“Sure,” Will said. “Good thing we bought the rings, huh?”

“Indeed.” They had gone to Jacqueline together and asked for a plain band set; titanium on the outside and white gold on the inside. They would match the engagement rings perfectly, and could comfortably be worn on the same finger. However, they had yet to put them on, wanting to preserve the significance of the act. It seemed that time was fast approaching. “I hope they come up with an acceptable menu, though.”

“Madeleine would have that covered,” Will assured him, and remembered something potentially horrifying. “Abigail, oh god, I hope she doesn’t sing! Do you think she was serious about that?”

“I would prepare myself for that eventuality just in case. Which location do you think they chose?”

“I haven’t the slightest, but if I see just one gold-leaf chair…”

Hannibal laughed, the sound echoing in the garage. “I think you have made yourself quite clear on that, my love,” he said, and saw the elevator doors opening. “Here they come.”

Walking arm in arm with Madeleine and dragging a roller luggage behind him was, apparently, Brian. He was of average height and perhaps a bit below the average weight, had the same curly hair Will and Madeleine had but he wore it shorter and neater than Will, and it was a lighter brown than his. He had big, shapely brown eyes, a roman nose, a clean-shaven narrow chin- most likely from his father- and he was waiting with his hand extended towards Will.

“Oh,” Will hastened to shake his hand. “Sorry, hi.”

“It’s nice to finally *meet* you, Will,” Brian said, the deep baritone incongruent with his slight appearance. “*Mom* told me *so much* about you, and your *partner* of *course*.” He turned to Hannibal for a handshake. “You must be Hannibal.”

“The one and only,” Hannibal nodded, shaking his hand. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Williams.”

“Likewise,” Brian said, manners impeccable. Will took a moment appreciate that he was not raised in a household where his manners were policed to the degree that he ended up like… This.

“Well,” Beau said, clearing his throat. She gestured towards the car. “Shall we?”

Luggage put away at the trunk, Brian, Will and Hannibal took their place in the back seat, in that order. Will had bought this car when he was in possession of five dogs and counting, so at least it was reasonably spacious and at least the guy smelled like he never once in his life used a cologne with a ship on the bottle. He was chatty, though, and in the span of the half hour it took to get them to a lake-side restaurant, they learned all about his long-term girlfriend (*We **also** prefer **‘partner’***,) Jennifer (*She was **so** upset she could not make it. It’s **hard,** you know, running one’s **own** business*,) his two orange tabby cats (*Thelma and Louise, **God** but they’re little **rascals**! But I’d love them **so much more** if they didn’t shed like **crazy**,)* and his donations to the local homeless shelter (*I believe it is important for **us** to **help** the **needy** however we can.*)

“Wow,” Will said at last, unable to hold it back. Upon Hannibal’s nudge, he amended with, “It’s very good that- that you do that.” Brian gave him a smile that displayed his straightened, whitened teeth in return, and Hannibal chose that moment to conveniently look out the window to admire the view. Well, at least he was entertained. Will met Beau’s eyes on the rear-view mirror, and made himself think long and hard about sad, abandoned dogs so he would not burst out laughing.

At the first chance he got, he pulled Hannibal aside and told him to come up with a plausible excuse for them to leave. They had a suit to find for Will, which they could not proclaim so as not to ruin the family’s surprise, and Will did not think he could take the relentless chatter

in such a concentrated form for more than another half hour, which was also something he could not give voice to.

“Hold on for at least forty-five minutes, darling, so it is plausible to depart without being rude.” Hannibal had the audacity to fucking smirk at him. Will considered stepping on his plain toe oxfords, but trying to act like the well-adjusted adult that he wasn’t, he refrained.

"I don't know if I care for politeness," Will murmured. "This is… He’s just so...”

“Condescending?”

“That, but elevated to a Godly superiority complex,” Will blinked hard, flabbergasted. “I mean I guess I should be used to it, but unlike you he’s just so *crass*.” So much for well-adjusted adulthood.

“How delightfully ruffled you are,” Hannibal said softly, but then affected a serious demeanour. “I see the severity of the situation, my love. You go right ahead. I will be right back.”

With one last dejected look at Hannibal, Will turned and made his way through the restaurant to the table his folks occupied by the large windows overlooking the lake.

“They wanted to seat us *all the way* back, but *I* let them know what I thought about *that*,” Brian immediately updated him, before Will could take his seat next to Beau. “It’s important to be *vocal* about one’s preferences, I believe. People *can’t* just *read* your *mind*, right?”

Will took a glance at the waiters drawing half-circles around their table, avoiding eye contact. “Lucky them,” he murmured under his breath. Beau let out a quiet sigh, and subtly placed a hand on his knee in a gesture of solidarity. He must have found the guy as unsettling as Will did, and god, Will loved his dad.

“So, Will,” Brian smiled at him with almost all his teeth on display. “I *heard* that you worked for the *FBI*, so I googled you. Those were some *grizzly* things that you dealt with. You were a *special* agent, right?”

Will nodded. The guy’s emphases were grating on his nerves. Madeleine looked bashful as well, but aside from a tiny shake of her head, she stayed impartial.

“A career in criminal justice sounds *prestigious*,” Brian sighed, ignoring the waiter at his right filing his glass with water. “Sometimes I *wish* I could have been right for it. Alas, *I* am not fit to have a *boss*.”

“Have trouble following directives, do you?” Will began. He wanted so badly to pull the guy down a notch or five, but for Madeleine’s sake, he kept it in. “It’s not for everyone, I guess,” he finished lamely.

“And what do you do *now*?”

“I am a private investigator. FBI’s bloodhound, as Hannibal used to call me.” Will took a sip from his newly filled glass, trying to appear as unassuming as he possibly could. “And I’m

very good at my job," he added the mocking emphasis and watched Brian's smile falter momentarily. He made a mental note to look into the guy if only to satisfy the vindictive monster inside.

"That he is," Hannibal appeared behind Will, a hand on his shoulder and a proud smile on his face. "I would not want to end up on his radar, that is for certain," he added innocently. "I apologize for the delay. I received a phone call from Abby, and I'm afraid she's demanding our presence as soon as possible."

"Is she alright?" Will and Beau asked at the same time, only Beau's concern genuine at the moment.

"She sounded perfectly fine," Hannibal assured Beau. "I believe she and her guest want to speak to us. And you know how young people are."

"Oh yes, let's go," Will said. Hannibal, the foresighted man that he was, had already taken a step back, so the chair Will kicked back did not hit him. Putting it back to its place, Will turned to Beau, Madeleine and Brian.

"Sorry. See you at dinner?" Nodding his head at the reassurances offered to him, Will led Hannibal out of the restaurant. "Thanks for not making me wait forty-five minutes."

"You are very welcome, Will," Hannibal said as he led him to the taxi he arranged for during his absence. "Abigail drove a hard bargain, though. In exchange for vouching for us and telling them we dropped by, she demands we forgive Lily."

Will frowned. "Were we cross with Lily?"

"She was under that impression, yes." Hannibal said with a sniff. "I had to accept."

"Hannibal," Will shifted so he was closer, leaning in to whisper into his ear. "Were you mad that Lily, after finding out something so fundamental about Abigail, wanted some time to process?"

"No, I was not. However, apparently, I addressed her as Miss Thomas during our brief exchange at Abigail's. It must have hit a nerve."

"Have you no heart?" Will teased. He was feeling much better now that a) Abigail was happy, and b) there were no condescending half-brothers around. "Now if we can get over the wedding without me strangling that asshole…"

"Why not?" Hannibal whispered with a curious tilt to his head as the streets passed them by.

"He's too close," Will replied, but they both knew it was an excuse. He did not want Madeleine hurt, and wasn't that a significant change to his initially distrusting, later on indifferent stance with her?

"Once again expanding your family, are you, Will?"

Will turned to find Hannibal's bright eyes on himself and heaved a deep sigh. "It's *our* family now, *my darling partner*."

Hannibal's smile spread to the rest of his face, and he conceded with a graceful bow of his head.

*

They returned to Beau's in time for dinner and with a new suit for Will that Hannibal discreetly took upstairs. As promised, he had chosen the suit, complete with the shirt, vest, tie and pocket square. It was a dark, midnight blue suit with a very subtle stripe pattern that was undetectable unless one looked very closely. He chose a white shirt to create contrast, and a light grey and blue paisley tie with a matching pocket square to gather the look together. It had the possibility to clash with Hannibal's dark grey suit with the red accents; the one he had meant to wear the night he proposed, and the one that made Will's eyes lose focus. However, as they agreed beforehand, their goal was to look good for each other. Hannibal also appreciated the symbolism behind it all: They were different, but oh, how well they worked together against all odds.

He gently hung the suit, and after washing up, he and Will joined the others in the backyard.

"I wasn't expecting to see you for a few more hours, at least," Beau exclaimed, looking pleasantly surprised and a bit flushed from the beer he was drinking. "Your shopping trips take a looong time, after all." Abigail and Lily giggled, their hands entwined on the table top. Next to them, Brian looked from Hannibal and Will to Beau and back again. Gladly, nobody made an explanation for him. Madeleine, from her place at the head of the table opposite Beau, gestured towards the vacant chairs on the side of the table for them to take.

"Hello again, Lily," Hannibal addressed her specifically as he took his seat, and observed the fine tension leave her face and shoulders.

"Hello, Hannibal. Will," Lily said, and Will gave her a wink before filling his plate. They could not talk more about their reunion due to the ruse they were carrying out, but Hannibal found that no words were necessary to convey to each other how glad they all were. Abigail, her eyes still a bit swollen and reddish but radiating joy, grinned and bent her head forward to hide it. She failed spectacularly and it was alright, because so had Will.

"It's *amazing* that you are *so* open-minded, mom. And you, Beau," Brian said, chewing his salad. "I know that *dad* would have been an absolute *nightmare* if I were like *you*," he said, waving his fork from Abigail and Lily to Hannibal and Will. Unseen from her place at the corner, Abigail rolled her eyes at the jab, seemingly acclimatized to the man's mannerisms already. Will's hand, however, clenched once around his knife. Hannibal, curious as to how this may go, remained observant, his good spirits undisturbed.

At the mention of her late husband and the implications in the statement, Madeleine gave her younger son a strained smile. "You know what, sweetie, I'm not so sure. Because you are just like your father and you would *never* behave so disgracefully, would you?" She finally looked at him with a clear warning in her eyes. "And there's nothing here to be open-minded about," she concluded, not leaving Brian any room to continue without crossing her.

It was a rebuttal that was conveyed so pleasantly, but it landed where it was meant to land. Brian's chewing slowed, and he sat up straighter. "You are right, of course" he said after he swallowed. Madeleine must have had enough of his insinuations in the time they spent together, and Hannibal admired her for the effortless way she put an end to the covert discourtesy. For the sake of everyone involved, Hannibal it would last.

"I was thinking," Beau said, ignoring the exchange altogether, "that we can have dinner somewhere else tomorrow. To celebrate Abby and Lily's reunion," he added. It was such an out of character thing for him to say, unless of course he was asked to do so. Hannibal realized that he would be wedded by this time tomorrow. Will must have reached the same conclusion, because he decided to give the rest a hard time.

"Oh, Hannibal can cook. Can't you, darling?" With raised eyebrows, Will met Hannibal's gaze. "I'd prefer your cooking to whatever we may be served outside."

"I already have a menu in mind," Hannibal didn't miss a beat accepting the challenge. "It would be just like my dinner parties in Baltimore. I do find myself missing those as of late," he concluded with a wistful smile, laying it on thick just to see Will's smile grow.

"Yes, exactly," Will said to Brian. "You should definitely try it. They are to *die* for." Beau inhaled his beer and ended up in a coughing fit. Abigail patted him on the back.

"While Hannibal's cooking is absolutely delicious," Madeleine said once Beau assured everyone he was fine, the same elegance to her words as always. They must have made the arrangements already. "I find myself in the mood for an outing too, with all of us together, and without bothering with the dishes, for a change," she deadpanned with a wry curl to her lips. It was a passable performance.

"Me too," Abigail rushed to agree with her. "I think I'd like a change, to go out. I've been separated from *ma chérie* for so long. Now that she's here, I wanna party!" Hannibal saw Abigail squeeze the hand she was holding, and sure enough, Lily came to her aid.

"I'd really like that too," she said, allowing a few strands of her blond hair to fall over her face, looking at Hannibal and Will with sincerity. "We've both had to go through a lot. I want to celebrate us coming out stronger than ever."

An expectant air fell over the table, and with one last exchange of barely-hidden looks of amusement with Will, Hannibal put an end to their suffering. "Alright. If that is what you all want, I shall cook another evening."

*

To their credit, everybody proved themselves to be quite discreet. Sure, Will caught a hastily ended phone call here and a hushed conversation there, but overall, they were doing pretty well to keep him and Hannibal oblivious. They were letting them have an easier time of it, too, as they sprawled under the tree in the backyard, Will enjoying a quiet session of stalking Brian's pristine online presence while Hannibal drew him in all his unwedded glory for the last time.

“Aren’t you tired of my face?” Will asked without lifting his eyes from the tablet.

“Let me answer that with a question of my own,” Hannibal said, using the tip of his thumb to carefully work the charcoal into the paper. “Do you think Botticelli ever tired of immortalizing Simonetta Vespucci’s visage?”

“I… don’t know?”

Hannibal looked at him coyly, tenderly, through his eyelashes. “Contrary to what some contemporary historians may believe, the answer is no, Will. He died more than three decades after her and she was his muse until his last breath. He asked to be buried at her feet.”

“So it’s your word against historians.”

“I think, *mylimasis*, one needs to experience the kind of consuming love that makes one welcome death with open arms in hopes of reuniting with one’s beloved before professing to know about it,” Hannibal said, confident as though he were stating a fact more than his opinion.

“Of him I love day and night*,” Will recalled a poem he read years before he even met Hannibal, the sentiment clicking into place in his mind. His research was instantaneously forgotten, and watched as Hannibal, all quiet composure and a peculiar sense of solidity, of safety and confidence that only he seemed to exude, got up from his chair and came to kneel next to Will. The tablet was quickly put away, and Hannibal took his hands in his, inspecting their rings as though it was the first time he laid eyes on them.

“*And I dream'd I went where they had buried him I love, but he was not in that place,*
And I dream'd I wander'd searching among burial-places to find him,
And I found that every place was a burial-place.”

As he recited the poem, the cadence of his voice carried Will away to visions where Hannibal, so casual in his speeches about death and his own distribution of it, still mourned the death of his sister, Mischa, and feared the death of his beloved, Will. The distant look in his eyes as he composed, his reaction to seeing the woman at the tailors who he thought would have resembled Mischa had she survived, the way he held Will slightly tighter after a particularly violent hunt.

“Well,” Will opened his eyes, not having noticed they had slid shut at one point. Hannibal was regarding him with a reverent look, not putting any effort to hide his melancholy. With a faint smile, Will said, “I, for one, am planning to live a long, healthy life with you. Better practice drawing wrinkles already.” He rearranged their hands so he was enveloping both Hannibal’s in his, emphasizing his words with a light squeeze. “I’d be terribly cross with you if you did disservice to my geriatric mug.”

Hannibal’s reply was a tender kiss on his lips, a lingering thing that communicated his feelings of gratitude, disbelief, and determination to preserve and protect. Morbid as their random expressions of love for one another were, Will leaned into the kiss. Neither stopped

even when they heard Abigail and Lily enter the backyard with muffled giggles to, without a doubt, collect some photographic evidence of the moment.

This was a day of celebration, after all.

*

“Why would I change?” Will asked. Hannibal, Lily, Beau and Brian- who had stayed in Madeleine’s hotel and dropped by late afternoon- were downstairs doing God only knew what. Will, on the other hand, had been followed and cornered in the bedroom by Madeleine and Abigail, clearly the masterminds behind the concept of surprising them with their own wedding. He gestured at his own shirt and pants; his everyday ensemble. “This is perfectly acceptable, is it not?”

Madeleine, in a tasteful navy sheath dress, complete with a clutch and a set of pearl accessories, said, “It’s just that we have made the reservation at a...” She turned to Abigail for support. “A place, where…”

“You go downstairs, Maddie, I got this,” Abigail gave her a confident nod. “Go on. We’ll be right with you.”

Madeleine departed with one last look over her shoulder at Will’s casual attire. Abigail closed the door quietly and swirled around to Will, a finger held threateningly up to his face.

“Listen here, you smartass,” she snarled. “I suspected when I couldn’t find your rings anywhere that you guys figured it out. Now you are just overdoing it.” At the sight of Will’s devious grin, she came closer. “Cut it out and put on something decent!”

“I don’t have to do that at all,” Will shrugged. “And you wouldn’t want *Maddie* to be upset at the ruined surprise, would you Abigail?”

Abigail, eyes narrowed and chin tight, inhaled deeply. “Just spit it out.”

“Now we’re talking.” Will went to the wardrobe and reached in, revealing his pristine suit in its clear protective covering. “I’ll put this on. But,” he said, dead serious in an instant. “You will keep that pretentious asshole away from me all evening.”

Abigail actually hesitated, her hands smoothing the skirt of her strapless bouffant dress, the celadon green material gliding through her fingers. “That would require me to be social with him,” she said, and for a brief second Will considered sparing her of the trouble. The operational word being “brief”, he shook it off easily.

“That’s my condition,” Will said. “Hell, I’ll even let Hannibal do my hair. Just keep him away.”

“Tell him to comb it backwards and to the side,” Abigail said at last. Victory had never felt so good. “Does he have the rings as well?” Will nodded. “Good. Make sure you act surprised.” With that, she left him to get dressed. He presented Hannibal with a comb and took his place

before the mirror when the man came looking for him, and that was just as well, seeing as his eyes lit up at the chance to get Will ready for the evening to his liking.

“I wonder where it is, and how they planned for the thing,” Will said as his hair was gelled. “Will they expect a bouquet toss, or God forbid, a garter toss?”

“I think we can trust them, Will, to know us well enough not to venture there,” Hannibal said, his dexterous fingers arranging Will’s hair, checking in the mirror to see if it looked impeccable on the front too. “Nonetheless, I find myself quite curious to see how it will all turn out, considering the very short amount of time they had to organize.” He turned Will around and stepped right into his personal space, bringing their hips together but leaning back a bit to admire his handiwork. “You look like you’ve stepped out of a dream, Will.”

Will let himself meet the appreciative gaze without fear, blush and all. “A good one, I hope?”

“A very good one,” Hannibal said, and came closer, forehead to forehead.

Will, careful not to mess up Hannibal’s already flawless hair, rested one hand at his nape, the other around his waist. “So, no second thoughts?”

“None whatsoever.” Hannibal was holding him by the shoulder, and the slightest twitches in his hands told Will he was stuck between simultaneous wishes to pull Will closer and mess him up, and to keep him presentable for the upcoming hours.

“Let’s go, then,” Will stepped back and grasped Hannibal’s hand, effectively putting an end to his dilemma.

*

Beau’s car took Madeleine and Brian while Will, Hannibal, Abigail and Lily took their rental and followed them to the mystery spot. Neither had to fake their surprise when they got to the venue because neither expected it.

“Abigail…” Will murmured. “The bar where I got shitfaced? Really?”

“The bar where you two made up after your first serious disagreement since you got together,” Abigail grinned, “where the lighting is phenomenal, just like you wanted!”

The place was closed to patrons for the night, a black chalkboard plaque on the sidewalk simply announcing this the venue for “Will and Hannibal.” Arrangements of white flowers adorned the corners of the shopfront, large green leaves around tiny blooms of baby’s breath and seasonal daisies. The place was glowing in the rapidly darkening evening, making Will remember his house in Wolf Trap, the boat on the sea of darkness, making him feel safe as he viewed it from a distance.

“Come on then, get moving!” Abigail threw open the car door and went to where Beau, Madeleine and Brian were standing and waiting for them to exit the car. Lily lingered long enough to say, “If you need a moment, I’ll try to hold them off.” With that she also exited, and Will watched her, clad in the lilac coloured halter dress Abigail had packed for herself,

make their way to the others. Beau looked dashing in his old but well-cared for brown suit, with Brian standing behind him and Madeleine on his arm, his proud eyes on Will's expression of surprise. A flash went off, reminding everyone that Abigail would try to document the night meticulously.

Hannibal reached for his hand, and after a reciprocal squeeze, they exited without the need to exchange words for how staggering it felt to have their family, have this life, have each other. They already knew.

"Surprise!" Madeleine exclaimed the moment their feet hit the ground. She appeared giddy with excitement, conveying that the arrangements have been to her liking at least. "What do you think?"

Will only nodded, not trusting himself to speak. He felt affected by their efforts despite his previous determination not to let himself get emotional. Hannibal gestured towards the door, and he took it as his chance to avoid the eyes on him and collect himself.

Inside was another blow to his composure.

The square, oaken cafe tables were removed barring three: They were placed side by side in the middle of the cafe, a handful of wooden chairs surrounding them, with centrepieces of the same white flowers as outside. The glasses and silverware were reflecting the warm light of dozens of lanterns hanging on the walls. The middle was framed with cocktail tables lining the walls, the decoration tasteful and simple. The corridor to the side led to the backyard, and Will could make out more cocktail tables under lantern lights. By the bar at the back were the familiar faces of Oliver the bartender and a few of his co-workers, all dressed sharply for the night. Oliver took one look at Will and Hannibal, his brows rose in recognition. He then grinned and gave him a thumbs up.

"I was right," he heard Hannibal say, "You really have come through for us, Madeleine."

She laughed out loud. "Oh, I could not have done this without Abigail's assistance. This place was-"

The door opened and two people, a man and a woman in in their late fifties, burst in. "Beau, Maddie! I was so worried we'd be late!"

"Charlie!" Beau immediately gave the man a bear hug, patting him in the back. Will flinched in sympathy. "And Meredith, welcome," he said, opting to shake Meredith's hand. "Glad you could make it."

Their arrival broke everyone's reverie, and they slowly took their places. Will and Hannibal sat next to at the end closer to the bar while Brian, as if the universe took pity on Abigail, was accosted by Charlie and Meredith on the other end. The two heads of this makeshift table was left vacant, with Madeleine, Beau, Will and Hannibal on the one side, and Charlie, Brian, Meredith, Abigail and Lily on the other.

"You are still on duty," Will told Abigail, who was seated directly in front of him. "Don't think you'll get off this easy."

“I know, I know.”

Lily regarded her quietly for a moment, took in the side-braid hiding her ear and the green and white checkered scarf hiding her scar. She must have come to some sort of a decision because she reached to undo the scarf, tucking it into her purse. Abigail, scar on full display now, turned to her in question.

“Nothing to hide, Abigail,” Lily said with a shrug, as though it really meant nothing. It was the first time Will heard her use Abigail’s real name, too, and he looked down as they shared a kiss.

“Hannibal,” he murmured, low enough to only be heard by him over the instrumental music that played in the background. “Distract me or I’m going to embarrass myself.”

“There’s a stage over there, and the microphone is set up,” Hannibal promptly offered, keeping his voice low as well and indicating with his head to the area behind the table where the line of cocktail tables were broken. “I believe she’s going to go for it.”

“Good, that’s good,” Will murmured. It was a good enough distraction, so good in fact that he noticed what he said with delay. “Wait, no, that’s horrible.”

“And I believe they hired a photographer as well.” Will just then noticed a harried looking woman standing by the bar with a professional camera hanging off her neck, talking to the bartenders and pointing and waving at different spots within the area.

“I don’t know if I want to cry more or less now,” Will said, “but thank you.”

“Anytime, *mylimasis*,” Hannibal replied with a smirk.

Contrary to Will’s expectations, this organization lacked the formality he associated with weddings. They were served the drinks of their choice and everyone was having a merry time talking to each other. Brian was passionately explaining his work to Beau’s friends, Abigail and Lily were catching up on each other’s lives, Beau was trying to convince everyone for a week-long fishing trip, and all of it felt very cordial, homely even, even (or especially) with the photographer circling around the table and occasionally asking for a pose or two due to being used to the same treatment from Abigail. He could almost forget why they were there, the passage of time eluding him, as he and Hannibal discussed Lily’s upcoming role and Abigail’s impressive score in her French proficiency exam.

Until the officiant appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, greeting everyone with a wave and making his way to the stage with fast, shuffling steps. He looked more like an academic than what Will thought an officiant would look like; the receding hairline, the horn-rimmed glasses, the sweater he wore over his shirt and his slightly slouching stance making him appear as though he would be reading from the slides and asking the exact same questions in every exam he made throughout his teaching career. Will was surprised when the guy opened his mouth to call them to the stage instead.

Under the watchful gazes of their small group of friends and family, Will and Hannibal situated themselves on either side of the man who greeted each with a handshake and a shy

smile. The soothing music dimmed to signal the beginning of his speech.

“Welcome, everyone, and thank you for gathering here today. Let me begin by saying that I talked to two people as we planned for the evening. One was Mrs. Williams, who asked me for a long speech about what love and marriage means, and a Miss Parker, who told me to keep it short because, and I quote,” he said, taking out a piece of paper from his pocket. He squinted at it, and read it verbatim. “‘They’re so in love it’s sickening. Like, *they know*, okay? Just keep it simple.’”

Abigail’s exclamation of “Hey!” triggered laughter across the table and the staff. Will pressed his lips together but failed and grinned at Hannibal, who returned it, crooked-teeth and all.

“And I can see what she meant,” the officiant continued, shoving the paper back in his pocket and pushing his glasses up his nose. “So. The venue is amazing, love is amazing, and marriage is amazing. Let us hear from our couple any words they may like to share.”

The light mood set by the officiant shifted for Will as maroon eyes found his, their intensity stealing his breath. “This is all I ever wanted, Will,” Hannibal said simply, and Will recalled their first hunt together, both of them covered head to toe in blood that looked black under the light of the full moon, clinging to each other as they fought for breath. It had been the first time Will experienced how well they really worked together; their moves complementing each other, their heartbeats in synch, their prey wild and desperate. It had been better than anything he came up with before, anything he could have imagined. He had thought Hannibal looked magnificent then, delirious in his bloodlust, a primordial god amongst the mortals. “For both of us,” Hannibal added, words he had uttered to Will on that night as he held him to his chest like something precious.

At the end of the day, whatever they had, they fought for it tooth and nail. They had come a long way, and the path was sodden with blood; theirs as well as many others’. They overcame impressive webs of lies and deception, mistrust, self-denial; they knocked each other down and got up, each time in blood, sweat and tears, to find their ways back to each other.

And none of the people here, barring Abigail, could ever know the depth of their devotion and regard for each other.

“It’s beautiful,” Will whispered, hearing his past self echo him. He could almost see the blood on Hannibal’s red accented suit like that night, and when he reached for Hannibal’s hand, he could feel it, slippery and warm.

Hannibal held on tight.

Everyone was so still, so quiet that one could hear a pin drop. “And now,” the officiant cleared his throat to say, “Hannibal, do you take Will to be your husband?”

“I do,” Hannibal said, sincere and resolute.

“And Will, do you take Hannibal to be your husband?”

Will gave Hannibal a lopsided smile. “I do,” he said. Hannibal took out their rings from his front pocket without waiting for a prompt. Will kept looking at this man (*this man this man this man*) while the band was slid onto his finger. He knew him so well that the lines around his mouth, the flicker in his lashes, even the wayward strand of hair that broke free from the gel’s hold and fell in front of his eyes, they all told him how Hannibal Lecter, Count and Doctor, the Chesapeake Ripper, the Copycat, il Mostro di Firenze, le Harbinger de l’île, the monster and the man, was so very much affected by the simple gesture. Will felt honoured that he could bring this out in him, make him feel this much with this ferocity, just as he felt for Hannibal.

He returned the gesture, and took a moment to admire the sight of their hands bearing hard evidence of their conjoining.

“Before your friends and family, I pronounce you husbands. You are now married, and you know what to do,” the officiant said. The laughter, clapping and whistles were a distant thing as their lips met and Will tasted blood, the scent of copper thick in his nostrils.

“I love you,” he whispered, close enough still to share his breath. He was drawn into another kiss, this one less restrained, increasing the volume of the cheering. Somewhere, someone popped up a champagne bottle.

The moment they parted and faced the table, they were attacked. Well, Will was attacked, by a teary-eyed Abigail. Hannibal was accepting well-wishes at a perfectly respectable distance while Abigail cried on Will. “I’m sorry about what I said. I didn’t think he would take notes,” she said finally, withdrawing to wipe her face without messing her mascara while Will laughed.

“It’s fine,” Will said, and let Lily, too, approach him

“I know we couldn’t actually talk about, you know,” she said into his ear, disguising it within the embrace, “but I want to thank you. You made me realize a lot, about everything, and,” she released him, “I wish you all the happiness in the world, Will.”

They smiled at each other in unvoiced understanding. “Right back at you,” Will said instead.

“Son.”

Lily retreated when Beau came to stand with them, and left them to congratulate Hannibal.

“Dad.” Will noticed the dampness around the man’s eyes, knowing without being told that this wedding meant a lot to him.

“Don’t mess it up,” Beau said gruffly and dragged him, engulfing Will in his embrace. Uncaring for how it would tousle up his hair and make creases in his suit, Will returned it. He felt so safe, so supported and cared for here, with his family who were happy for him, but especially with his father. He and Beau had won a long-lasting war with their sad bastard genes, and tonight could be viewed as the tangible proof of their triumph, their conquest even.

“I won’t,” he said, voice muffled in Beau’s rough linen suit.

“I hate to interrupt, but may I borrow my *husband*?” Hannibal’s voice sounded so smug that Will laughed, withdrawing from his father’s vice grip. “It appears that we need to sign the marriage certificate so the officiant can take his leave.” He paused a second, weighing Beau, before adding, “We would also appreciate it if you and Madeleine could be our witnesses.”

Finally meeting Hannibal’s eyes, looking honestly one more heartfelt statement away from outsight sobbing, Beau said, “Sure, son,” and went to fetch Madeleine.

“Will, did your father just call me his son?” Hannibal deadpanned.

Will stared at the man’s retreating back in shock. “Well, I’ll be…”

*

They signed the documents in one of the rooms upstairs, where the staff took their breaks. Afterwards, Madeleine and Beau accompanied the officiant downstairs, thus giving Will and Hannibal their first opportunity in the evening to be alone. They sat side by side on a large, velvet sofa, with Hannibal’s arm around Will’s waist and Will’s head on Hannibal’s shoulder.

“So that’s that,” Will sighed. When he lifted his head to look at Hannibal, his lips were captured in a soft kiss. “You’re okay with it then?” The question was barely uttered when Hannibal, using the grip around Will’s waist, pulled him in for another kiss. “Am I not supposed to talk now?” Again, he was kissed, as well as he could be kissed when he was grinning like a loon. Hannibal was determined, though, and he slowly made his way down Will’s neck, pressing his lips and nibbling at any patch of skin his suit allowed.

“I told you once, I wanted the world to know that you are mine, as I am yours.” The low murmur against his neck did things to Will that it had no right to do at this time and place. “I am, for the lack of a better word, rapturous.”

“It is a very, uhm,” Will said, breathy from Hannibal’s administrations already. He held Hannibal’s head close, however, lest he stopped. “A very small world that got to see it.”

“Our family,” Hannibal breathed, the flexing of his muscles the only warning Will had before he was positioned on Hannibal’s lap, straddling his thighs. This show of strength, as always, worked very hard to short-circuit the part of Will’s brain that cared about meagre things such as “public indecency.” He ground down, hard, and relished Hannibal’s groan, rewarding it with a biting kiss.

“When this is over, when we are finally, truly alone” Will murmured, pressing his lips to Hannibal’s cheekbone. “I will *wreck* you, Hannibal.”

Hannibal’s hands tightened on his waist, holding him still as he thrust up. “You are doing a very good job right now, *mylimasis*,” he said. Will took in his dishevelled hair, the ruined lines of his suit, and bit back a moan.

“Say it,” he demanded. “I know you want to. Say it again.”

“My husband,” Hannibal said, voice failing halfway, and Will knew that it would be quite corny, cringeworthy even, had it been anyone else but them uttering the word with reverence. In their quest to become one, to merge their skin and have the same heart pump the same blood through their veins, this was as significant a step as any they’d taken so far. The word spoke of years of internalized solitude, of the disbelief in the possibility of having a counterpart, someone who would fit perfectly into their ragged edges, make them more than the sum of all their parts combined.

Unconditional, unashamed recognition and wholehearted, veracious acceptance.

It felt cathartic.

Which was why, at the sound of his phone ringing, Will let out a growl. It was a struggle to take it out of his pocket, and with the assumption that it was someone downstairs calling to check in on them, he accepted the call without looking.

“What?”

A pause. “Good evening to you too, Will,” the voice said. And Will threw himself off of Hannibal and to the side, landing in an ungraceful heap on the sofa.

“Jack? Hello, Jack, hi. Uh, how are you?” He said, trying to compensate the feeling of being caught by talking fast and in an overly excited manner.

“Is this a bad time?” Jack asked, and it was a wonder that, in the time they did not communicate, the man developed a sense of boundary with Will. Hannibal was smirking at him from where he was sprawled, legs still open and visibly aroused, his hand running teasingly across his own abdomen. Will averted his eyes immediately.

“I could talk,” he said instead. Really, it was as good an excuse as any to calm it down a bit between them. They were expected to go downstairs and enjoy the rest of the night, after all.

“And I have a truck driver and a couple, torn apart by a cave bear that went extinct thousands of years ago,” Jack said bluntly. “Nothing eaten, nothing taken, just pure savagery.” The tone softened, meant to convey sincerity. “I know it’s been some time, but I could really use your help with this one, Will.”

In the corner of his vision, Will saw Hannibal perk up at the description. “I, uh, hold on a second, Jack.” He covered the phone with a hand, and raised an eyebrow at Hannibal, whose tilt of head and the slight curl of bitten, reddened lips told him a lot. “You want in on this?”

“I would like to say hi,” Hannibal replied, a mischievous glint in his eyes. Will sighed. The day had to come sooner or later.

“Jack, I’m putting you on speaker,” Will watched the grin bloom across Hannibal’s face. He carefully kept his straight.

“Agent Crawford, what impeccable timing you have,” Hannibal said, jovial as could be. “I am so glad you called.”

“Doctor Lecter? Is that you?” Jack asked. A bit redundant really, since Hannibal’s accent was unmistakeable. “Are you with Will?”

“Undoubtedly so,” Hannibal replied, leaning in so what he said could not be mistaken. “In fact, we have just given our signatures. I believe the ink has yet to dry.”

“What are you talking about?” Jack asked, raising his voice a bit to be heard over the sirens in the background. Hannibal inclined his head, the bastard, passing up his turn so Will could be the one to spell it out for Jack. Or, to be more precise, so Jack could hear it from Will.

“We got married, Jack,” Will said. The sentiment solidified for him further upon vocalizing it. It was one thing to experience it oneself, and quite another, apparently, to relay the experience. Which was probably what Hannibal wanted for him. He sought Hannibal’s eyes, but found them closed as though he was savouring the words. “We’re at the wedding right now.”

The long silence that followed was only disturbed by the sounds that came from wherever Jack was, which was quite probably an active crime scene. “Wow,” came the reply at long last. “And how did this happen, exactly?”

The interrogating tone rubbed Will the wrong way. “Would you like a written statement?” The sharp quality of his voice made Hannibal’s eyes open, never one to miss out an opportunity to behold Will in all his spiteful glory.

“No, I,” Jack mumbled, sounding quite lost. “That was rude. I meant that- I never-” A sharp inhale was followed by a resigned exhale of, “I meant to say congratulations, Doctor Lecter, Will. It’s hectic out here, and I’m quite distracted right now. I’m sure you understand.”

“Of course. We understand.” Hannibal straightened Will’s hair and tie with careful hands, adjusting the pocket square as well for good measure. “I assume your call had something to do with the predicament you’re in.”

“I wanted to see if Will could weigh in on the case,” Jack said, and proved his years of experience as the head of the Behavioural Science Unit by not elaborating further, pushing for an answer without outright demanding it. Will rolled his eyes, and Hannibal smiled.

“What do you say, *mylimasis*?”

Will thought about it. Abigail could stay back with Lily at Beau’s or return to Paris as Aubrey Parker, either way avoiding the FBI radar. Will’s PI work was freelance and he was not required to return to it if he did not want to. Hannibal, though he rejected the notion of missing it, thrived in Baltimore and took great pleasure in dangling himself under the noses of the law enforcement. And Will had to admit that the idea of messing with Jack, or at the very least returning for a chance to see how far he’d come- with his empathy, with Hannibal, as a person- was alluring. If he was honest, he knew that between the two of them together, they could have their fun and remain perfectly safe while doing it.

“Once more unto the breach, Doctor Lecter?” He asked back, teasing. They both knew the decision was already made.

“It’ll be our honeymoon,” Hannibal replied, not adjusting his volume with the intention to be heard, clearly, by Jack. An awkward cough sounded from the phone, but Jack knew he had to keep his mouth shut, let them discuss it, so he could get what he wanted. Will rolled his lips between his teeth, biting to keep the laughter in.

“We’re in, Jack.”

“Wonderful! Where were you, again?” Will could see him wave at a passing rookie to write down their information. “Tell me and I’ll make the arrangements.”

“We wouldn’t want to bother you, Agent Crawford. We’ll get back to you soon enough.”

“Good night, Jack,” Will said, and before Jack could press on, he ended the call. Hannibal stole one more kiss before he got up and walked to the tall mirror by the door to fix his own appearance. The hair was a lost cause now, and Will loved it like this.

“You’re going to have to tone it down if we’re gonna do this,” he said, admiring *his husband*’s form, impressive even through the multiple layers of the suit.

“Tone what down?”

“The public displays of affection,” Will murmured. Sounds of off-key singing -*Abigail*- from downstairs reached them.

“I’m afraid I cannot make promises that I cannot keep, Will,” Hannibal said, and with one last pat at his collar, he extended a hand at him. “Not when you look like that.”

“Like what?” Will took the offer and got up, finding himself immediately in Hannibal’s space.

“Why, good enough to eat, of course.” Will scrunched up his nose at the reference.

“God, you’ve started already. No, Hannibal. No cannibalism puns. We need to be careful. No hunts while we’re there, either.”

“That, I can promise,” Hannibal said, as they walked towards the door. “Unless, of course,” he added while he shut it behind them, “there’s an altercation in which we need to defend ourselves.”

At the top of the staircase, Will froze. “Are you, honestly, planning something already?”

“As I always tell you, *dear husband*,” Hannibal said as he walked past Will and began to go down the stairs. “Never ask. It spoils the surprise.”

Will watched the man (*this man this man this man*) make his way back to the party and be immediately spotted and dragged by Lily to space where the tables used to be, now turned into a makeshift dance floor, while Abigail wailed into the microphone on the stage. *They must have eaten while we were gone. How long were we gone?* Will thought as he descended, taking in Beau and Charlie laughing at one cocktail table while Madeleine, visibly tipsy, was whispering into a giggling Meredith’s ear at another. Even Brian looked like he was having a

good time at the bar with Oliver, shutting his gob for once and listening attentively as the bartender talked.

Beau noticed his return, and pointed at the two plates on the table by the far wall, left without a doubt for Will and Hannibal.

Will smiled, the moment captured by the photographer. Waving at her in acknowledgement, Will decided that if Hannibal could slow dance to Abigail's rendition of *Careless Whisper*, he could surely enjoy a few more surprises as they came his way.

And then he went to wrestle the mic from Abigail's hands.

Chapter End Notes

*Walt Whitman's poem, "Of Him I Love Day and Night"

So, that's that! I feel the need to say that I am nowhere near familiar with marriage procedures in the USA, so I researched what I could think to look up, and winged the rest. I hope nothing sticks out like a sore thumb. Oh and, for those who are interested, I based the venue on Bevolo (a real lighting shop that apparently does host weddings) but turned it into a café/bar for the purposes of the fic. If I could, I would live in one of their shops, they're so bright and pretty!

Thanks for reading! And if you feel so inclined, leave me a comment and let me know if you'd like a bloody Baltimore honeymoon <3

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